Australians at War Film Archive

Thomas Martin (Tom) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:50 **Again Tom, Chris and I say thank you for this opportunity to talk with you.**

My pleasure.

Can you begin by sharing with us just a brief overview of

01:00 **your life, where you were born to where you ended up with the war?**

Well, I was born in 1916 in North Sydney. My father had joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] 34th Battalion and when I was 14 months old he died of wounds at Passchendaele and when I, we were at that time with my mother's people. And when I was three went to a house at Mosman in Central Avenue

01:30 which was built by the Volunteer Workers Association. There were five of these houses built for war widows and so forth and I was there for about three years. When I was six we went to North Sydney because there was no school handy at that part of Mosman in those days, it was mostly bush. In fact we use to kill snakes, I used to go and kill snakes in the veggie garden. Must have changed now. We went back to North Sydney

02:00 and when I was nearly nine my mother married again. My stepfather was a man much older than she was. In fact he had children older than she was. He was an engineer. And his name was Stotkovsky. He was of Polish background but born in Wollongong. And then we moved out to Watsons Bay and he brought a house in Old South Head Road

02:30 just near the signal station and we were there, I was there for the next 25 years. And I went to Scots College from that area. I left school 1933, I left Scots the year in the depression in which the unemployment was the highest which was no good. I wanted to be a marine engineer and then gone on the ship to sign, but I had no chance. And the

03:00 Repatriation Department which is now DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] used to take an interest in me because I was an orphan and they talked me into doing chemistry. And it turned out to be pharmacy. So I got an apprenticeship with Washington Souls in 1934 and going to the university at the same time and qualified January 1938. And the next couple of years I was with Washington Souls

03:30 part time. I got put off at one stage when they were overstaffed and then of course 1939 the war broke out. And I tried to join the navy in the anti-submarine school at Rushcutters Bay, there was no vacancy then but in 1940 they started a yachtsmen's scheme, which people who had interest in small boats or experience in small boats, sailing or motor boats would

04:00 join up the navy at 2 shillings a day and go over the RN [Royal Navy], Britain, served in any type of ship at all and if you were suitable would be recommended for commission. So I did that, where our pay was changed to 4 shillings a day, double pay, which is paid in Sterling currency fortunately which was a bit of a help. And I went over to Britain

04:30 and I was sent to a ship called the [HMS] Kashmir, with seven other Australians. We served in the Pacific, in the Atlantic which is rough and the Mediterranean and the Kashmir was sunk at Crete by intensive dive-bombing. I'd been recommended to go to the Officers' Training School in the meantime. But when my ship was sunk I was badly wounded, all my papers were lost and so forth and I spent the next 8 or 9

05:00 months in various hospitals in the Middle East, Egypt and Palestine. And I was sent back to Australia for medical boarding, sent to Garden Island, made category B as physically and then I got a crash draft, my pay hadn't been paid for, oh, months and months I was in arrears. I was kept and that's what I got, I'd been getting handouts from the AIF or the Red Cross or anybody at all

05:30 that would give me a quid every now and again. Fortunately I was able to live at home at Watsons Bay. And at any rate I went to see the paymaster at Garden Island and I kept a note of all these payments

and he got a shock when he… And the next day of course I was given a crash draft to the HMAS Australia from this stirring up trouble. I spent the next few months on the Australia as an able seaman.

06:00 And after that I was sent to the Officers' Training School in Melbourne, Flinders Naval Depot. And I qualified there as a sub lieutenant in 1944 but they reckoned I wasn't fit to go to sea anymore. And I said, "I've been at sea for the last few years as an able seaman surely I can go." And they said "Oh no, officer is a much hardier job than an able seaman." That astonished me. So they gave me

06:30 a job ashore at Naval Force Melbourne, the Plans Department. I was a square peg in a round hole I reckon. Anyway I was there for…until I collapsed in the street and finished up in hospital again. And then I was sent to, after I came back to the navy I was put in Naval Control Service, Sydney, first of all and then later on Newcastle. They looked after the movements of merchant ship convoys and general merchant,

07:00 army and that sort of thing. And I was in that until the war ended. And in April '46 I was demobilised. I went back to Washington Souls. And I stayed there then until I retired in 1982. And I've been retired, that's what I reckon I started to live then. Anyway, I use to drive a car and

07:30 so forth. I had a sailing boat, used to sail with the Vaucluse Sailing Club of which I was treasurer for thirty years and later on president and made a life member in 1953. And later on a public officer of a company I incorporated and a job I retired from in 2002. I threw in my car-driving license when I was 85. I had to do a test. I probably could have

08:00 passed the test but I reckon that I wasn't fit to drive a car nevertheless. My reactions are too slow, you know, they're not what they use to be and if you get in an accident, well anything can happen. So I threw in my licence, sold my car to my eldest grandson. Didn't give him my sailboat. There we are, that was a couple of years ago.

Excellent, Excellent, thanks so

08:30 **much for that Tom. So you were saying Tom since you retired….?**

Oh, Maritime Museum and the small boats section. In the section of small boats up there they have 60 boats, motorboats, sailing boats, from a 30 foot boat down to an 8 foot sabot and we've got 60 of them down there. But I haven't been able to do that for the last few years I had a bit of

09:00 trouble. I've got false hips, falls in a heap and I fell over in the street in 1999. Somebody said I must have been outside the pub; it was outside the church as a matter a fact. And I fell over in the street, wrecked the steel hip there and broke my leg and since then I've been like this, [Tom is in a wheelchair] so I had to give up the museum.

Tom, can I now come back

09:30 **and let's talk about your life before the war?**

Yeah.

What are your first memories as a child growing up?

Oh at Mosman, the house we had at Central Avenue. In those days Central Avenue wasn't paved, it was just a dirt track and there was guttering, that's about all. We walked down our house, down steps and our ground went as far as I know,

10:00 there was nothing between us Quakers Hat Bay, just bush. Houses next door were there of course. And mother use to often have to go and kill snakes in the grass, hardly no snakes in Mosman these days. We got to and from the house by a tram which went from, a local tram that went from Cremorne to The Spit down Parraween Street and we

10:30 used to then get out and walk along Central Avenue to the house. The house was wooden. I think it was gas lighting, certainly it was gas cooking. The house is still there in fact, I saw it a few years ago; it looked the same except it had been sewered these days. And the house to us next door had been

11:00 rebuilt. There was also a dairy up the street where they used to milk the cows and so forth and I don't know much about, I knew it was a dairy and that's where the milk came from but that's about all.

So the toilet, because sewerage wasn't there, was that outside?

Oh outside, oh yes the man use to come round once a week or whatever, that was the common practice in those days.

11:30 Oh not only at Mosman but also all round Manly. And that part of the world was all unsewered.

So he came round every day, once a week?

Oh no, once a week, once a week.

What did he wear do you remember, clothing-wise?

The oldest clothes he had. Terrible job, somebody's got to do it I suppose.

12:00 **Were there many jokes about his job and what he did?**

Well I don't think so, I don't remember any. But the boys in those days were taught between what was wrong and what was right.

So what sort of things did you get up to with friends when you were at Central Avenue?

I don't really know, I don't really know.

12:30 I went to town one day, mother took me to town with the woman next door and her boy played up in town, I remember that. And mother said, "Never again." He disgraced us. To go to town we use to get the tram at Cremorne and the ferry to Circular Quay. And my grandparents

13:00 on my mother's side lived at North Sydney. So it was get the tram up to Spit Junction, the tram to North Sydney from there, having a ferry across. There was no bridge in those days, a ferry across to the Quay in those days. My father's parents lived at Enmore and to go from Mosman to Enmore was quite a business, all by public transport, quite a business, although we saw quite a lot of them. They used to come over

13:30 and visit us at Mosman.

Did you ever hear any stories about your dad, since he died when you were so young?

No. Just he wouldn't come back. He died at Williams at Passchendaele in October 1917 and I was fourteen months old. Oh no, I don't really know that much about that side of it.

14:00 I found out much later because I got to the Australian Archives all these records and all that sort of thing. But he was in the 34th Battalion they were badly knocked about at Passchendaele.

What was your mum like as a woman?

Oh gee, I don't know. She looked after me very well but she had the war widow's pension of course

14:30 which is not a great deal and our house at Mosman had been built by the Volunteer Workers Association which built for war widows and orphans, I don't, I think she owned the property, I'm not too sure about that, but the house is well built. It's still there, the only one that's still there.

And did your mum bring you up as a religious

15:00 **person?**

Not really, she's more religious later on than, much later. But no we didn't ever go to church; I don't know where the local church was. It was a fair distance away I suppose. When we moved to North Sydney when I was six I think, so I could go to school. So the church was handier then, St Thomas' in North Sydney, and I was sent to Sunday school of course. And

15:30 when we went up to Watsons Bay, they attended St Peters, not my parents, I was sent. I had to go. I was sent to St Peters Watsons Bay to a Sunday School there, but I was never very keen. I wasn't really keen at all.

So what school were you at when you were at North Sydney?

Oh it was a public school in North Sydney it was called Greenwood School because

16:00 Greenwood was the first headmaster. Now since then that area's all been redeveloped and there's a shopping centre there. It's known as Greenwood still and I think that part of the old school building is still in the complex. When she married, she had visions of sending me to Shore [Greater Public School] and I went to a little school called Ravenscraig up near St Leonards' Oval but I was only there a month or two and we moved to Watsons Bay.

16:30 **So how did you mum meet her second husband?**

Oh, through her sister. Her sister lived in Wollongong where she knew the old boy and known him for years and that's how she met him. So she was at that stage only fifty-six and he was sixty-eight, sixty-nine thereabouts and he had a,

17:00 as I say, a grown up family, grandchildren. And he looked after me very well. The only thing was that he was an engineer in the partnership and had an agreement with his partner never to employ a relative because at one stage in the early days he'd employed one of his first wife's relatives and the man was dishonest and it was very embarrassing. So I had no chance

17:30 of a job with the old boy, no chance. However that was a closed shop but anyway, there we were.

So you're growing up and you move then over to this side of the bridge [Sydney Harbour Bridge]?

Yes we had a house, an old stone house built in the 1800's, most inconvenient sort of a house. I thought

it was beautiful, made of big blocks of stone.

18:00 Opposite where the Dunbar was wrecked, she was wrecked outside the heads there in 1857 and the wreck was still down below. I used to go and dive and get bits out of it even then. Just across the road from us. A few people have suicided there too. However I watched with my cousins, the police bringing these bodies up

18:30 in a bag. However, Scots, of course, was at Bellevue Hill. I use to go to school in the tram to Rose Bay and walked up the hill or Double Bay and walk up the hill. I remember in 1927, I came home by walking down the hill to Double Bay and caught the tram and as we came up the hill

19:00 which was Double Bay and Point Piper, it was all vacant ground in those days. I could see something on the Harbour [Sydney Harbour]. A ship called the Tahiti ran over the Watsons Bay ferry, the Greycliffe, and there were forty people killed. When I got home I could see the Tahiti was stopped cause I knew all the ships in those days. I was mad on ships, and there was all this stuff floating about in the water and I told my mother, "Something's happened on the Harbour," and she said, " Oh, don't be silly."

19:30 and unfortunately, I was right. So I think there were forty people lost on the Greycliffe. She was a Watsons Bay ferry run over between Garden Island and Bradleys Head. Run over in the water there. She was going from Garden Island and the next stop was Milsons Point, but Tahiti overtook her. Tahiti was going too fast, beating the speed limit in the Harbour for

20:00 a big ship and hit the Greycliffe and over she went.

Just coming back to Scots firstly. Did you enjoy Scots College?

I did, I did. I thought my grandsons might have gone there but they didn't. My daughter did a great examination of all the schools around and about; Scots, Cranbrook, Sydney Grammar

20:30 and for her purpose she thought that Cranbrook was the best. And unfortunately between Scots and Cranbrook when I was a boy, there was a great gulf however it's become more peaceful now. Cranbrook I think is quite a good school. There's no doubt about that.

So what did you enjoy about Scots?

Oh I don't really know, nothing special. I was never really keen on

21:00 lessons but oh it was a good school. And in those days, the day, the year I left Scots I think there were three hundred and fifty pupils. We thought it was a real big school but now there's about fifteen hundred there. Much different, much different. The second last year I was there, we, our cadets started wearing the Scottish

21:30 uniform because [of] cadet practice. The Black Watch uniform, a kilt and so forth. The most uncomfortable…. they were very, very hot, the kilt. You know it's OK in Scotland. They wear them, but not out here. Since then they have a pipe band and it's done very well in exercises and exhibitions. But they didn't have a pipe band in my days. That was later.

22:00 **Well these days Scots has sea cadets, did they have sea cadets when you were there?**

No they only had the army cadets. They use to have parade on Friday afternoon. And they'd sent out a couple of chaps from Victoria Barracks, a couple of corporals to drill us in. We had an inspection by General Rosenthal I think his name was, about 1933

22:30 and we paraded our rifles and so forth. And they had a working party to clean the rifles; they didn't clean the rifles very well. So we were being inspected by General Rosenthal. You know, arms upheld and he'd look down the barrel and mate, whoever cleaned mine, didn't. There was a bit of cloth he'd shoved in there. Oh, he nearly had a

23:00 seizure, when he saw mine. I hadn't even looked down it. I thought it was clean, but it hadn't been cleaned. The first time I ever spoke to General Rosenthal. And the last.

Did you get in trouble for that?

Oh he went crook generally [lost his temper] but not at me. Anyway, we survived.

23:30 **And what sort of things were they trying to teach you in cadets?**

Oh just general army stuff, you know marching up and down and sloping arms and presenting arms and doing all sorts of rifle drill, fixed bayonets et cetera. At the time there was some trouble and people alleged to be communist, they'd suppose to have stolen rifles from Victoria Barracks and so forth

24:00 so all our rifles had the bolts removed from them. They were put away separately so if they pinch a rifle the bolt wouldn't work and it wasn't much good to them. None of ours were pinched but they did pinch some from Victoria Barracks.

They'd need ammunition after that don't they?

Oh yeah.

Cadet camps, did you go away?

I didn't go on any, they weren't compulsory and I wasn't all that keen. I

24:30 eventually became a corporal. I wasn't real keen to go to camps. I was more interested if they'd have gone sailing out in the boat, which I didn't have a chance to.

So why did you have a love of boats and sailing?

Well we moved to Watsons Bay of course and I had a bedroom upstairs in our house and a bit of a view of the ocean

25:00 over to Manly, over Mosman, up to Garden Island and I use to watch the ships. I use to get the paper every morning and check up on the shipping movements and see them as they go coming in and out. And go out on the pilot steamer, the Captain Cook. A friend of mine's father was a pilot. I used to go out on the pilot steamer. I'd generally get seasick but I loved it.

25:30 Anything to do with a boat, I was right.

Can you share with me a story of one of the times you went out with the friend and got seasick?

Oh it was most times. Nothing special no. Nothing special. The pilot steamer in those days was moored in the middle of Watsons Bay. Now there's a pilot station ashore there and they've got different types of boats altogether. It was

26:00 a, she was a steamship built in 1892 and she carried a couple of boats, like whaler type boats. They use to put the pilot in and go out to the ship and pick up pilots or put a pilot on the ship . There was two oarsmen and the coxswain had a sweep oar, cause as the boats moving

26:30 the rudder's no good but with a sweep, well you can oar like 'this' into the boat. And the pilot never sat down on the boat, they always stood up and hung onto a rope. Sometimes I used go and climb up the [UNCLEARS] onto the big ships.

So when you went with your friend onboard did you just watch, or did you row, or what did you do?

No, we

27:00 used to like going aboard on a Sunday because they had a dinner, had plum duck for dinner and we use to stop for dinner. I'd be allowed to steer the pilot steamer, under supervision. And I was on the one day and we were outside the heads [entrance to Sydney Harbour] and, "Come here." he says, "You take it, Tom." He put me on the wheel, "You take it to Watsons

27:30 Bay." Oh gee, I wasn't game to make a mistake. And I came in very carefully and when you got to Watsons Bay, the captain took over and put it on the buoy. But it was a boost to my ego. As I say I was too scared to make a mistake.

So when you were studying at school did you want to be a ship's pilot?

I wanted to

28:00 be a marine engineer and then go to naval architecture, designing ships. As a matter a fact I did a designing course much later when I was about to retire from Souls. I started going at night-time to Sydney TAFE [technical and further education college] and did the naval architecture course which in my case was four or five years and I passed that alright. And because I was too old to practice, I was well over sixty at that stage (I retired when I was in my sixty-fifth year)

28:30 which is the year before I became qualified as a naval architect. That would have been my ambition but I say the Depression was the, that cruelled me there.

Just before we get to the Depression, you mentioned the accident with the Tahiti

Oh yeah.

Were there, given your birds-eye view from your bedroom, were there other accidents on the Harbour?

I never saw any. I saw plenty

29:00 of ships but never any accidents. There were a couple of accidents but I didn't actually see them.

Also when you were there were there any beautiful ships that came into the Harbour that you remember?

Oh yeah. Aren't any more now. They are like square boxes these days. Yes there were ships came in, lots of ships,

29:30 lots of passenger ships, of course. But they don't have them anymore, they come by aircraft. Only cruise ships come in. Because the P & O [Pacific and Oriental] used to come here. They ran a fortnightly service to Britain, the Orient Line the same. Blue Funnel Line went right round the cape [Cape of Good Hope]. Aberdeen Line went around the Cape. The Australia Commonwealth Line taken over the Aberdeen Line. And cargo ships of course, Flan Line[?],

30:00 Alamen[?], Rockobank[?], they've mostly all been taken over by company takeovers these days. There are very few British ships left, I say none at all. In fact the latest British ship is the Queen Mary II which is just new and she was built in France cause nobody there could build her, I'm sorry, that's disgraceful.

So just coming back to some of the ships in the Harbour.

30:30 **Did the American Navy come at all?**

Yes the American Navy came here a year before we went to Watsons Bay. I think there were 14 battleships came in and the year before that the British Navy sent out two big ships the [HMS] Hood and the [HMS] Repulse and five cruisers. I watched them come in the Harbour because at North Sydney, our next-door neighbour was an engineer on a tug

31:00 and we were taken out on the tug to see the ships come in. Oh yes the American ships came here on a flag showing exercise in 1925 or 4, '25 I think. Early in '25. We went to Watsons Bay late in '25.

So what fascinated you about being

31:30 **a marine engineer instead of captain or pilot?**

Oh I liked the machinery, I like the machinery. Now when I was in the navy I was not an engineer there however .

Did you know any marine

32:00 **engineers, any people who….?**

Oh my stepfather's friend. He had a lot of friends in the business when he was…he was very old when he died. He was ninety odd. Ninety-three I think. He retired the year before that and I met some of his friends and so forth. One of them had designed ships too. He designed ships for the North Coast Company and I

32:30 used to drive him mad asking questions. He wanted me to go to Scotland as a matter a fact and get in a shipyard there. Well I thought (that was in the Depression) I don't know how I'm going to get employed in Scotland with quite a few… and the colonial that come and took somebody's job wouldn't have been very safe.

So growing

33:00 **up, you mentioned when you were at Central Avenue you had, if you went to the city, you had to catch a tram and then a ferry. What are your memories of the Harbour Bridge being built?**

Well in 1930 my mother was ill and I was sent to my aunt down at Brookvale and I use to have to go to Scots from Brookvale. Tram to Manly, ferry

33:30 up the Harbour and tram to Double Bay and of course the bridge was being built then. Well at that stage, the arch had just joined when I was at Brookvale. I remember the arch being joined. And of course they had the deck underneath that. The day after the bridge was opened we went across the bridge and there was six

34:00 lanes I think on the bridge. Two tram lines, two train lines and six car lines. My stepfather said, "This is silly to make a bridge this wide. They'll never use this many lanes." But they do now. But on the day the bridge was opened, the Captain Cook, the pilot steamer, lead a procession of ships from up the Harbour, up round Cockatoo Dock and those places

34:30 under the bridge while it was opened. And my friend got me on the Captain Cook and I was tickled pink. Come down the bridge in the Captain Cook she led the [procession]. Of course while she was underneath that, Jack Lang's… horse, the tape was cut and old Jack was… we didn't know that down below of course. [Tom is referring to the 'unofficial opening' of Sydney Harbour Bridge where a member of a fascist group the 'New Guard', by the name of Francis De Groot, charged forward on horseback and slashed the opening ribbon before Premier Jack Lang could do so.]

35:00 But the ships went; there were eight quite big ships in this procession. We picked them up around Cockatoo Dock, Darling Harbour that part of the world, and led them down.

So when you went to school, were you going to school across the bridge or were you already…?

No, only a tram from Watsons Bay and then of course from Brookvale, the tram and the Manly ferry.

35:30 I had a season ticket on the Manly boat and I thought it was Christmas; I was in big time, a season ticket holder.

And what was your mum sick from when you…?

Oh kidney problems, she had a kidney problem and in those days, her treatment or progress was… the mountains [The Blue Mountains west of Sydney] were a great place. The doctor said she should go up the mountains so she and a friend hired

36:00 a cottage at Glenbrook and we used to go up. My stepfather used to drive us up for weekends to Glenbrook, very often. She was up there for about three months and I travelled backwards and forwards on the Manly boat and that was very good.

And she got better or…?

Oh yes, she recovered. It was some sort of a kidney problem she had. I don't really know exactly what it was

36:30 because in those days little boys were never told these things.

Were you lonely growing up Tom?

No I wasn't lonely, no, I had friends round and about I never felt lonely, never.

You always got up to certain mischief I'm sure?

Oh yes, I had a half sister. My stepfather and my mother had a daughter when I was twelve

37:00 she went to Kambala [School] later on. Unfortunately she's now deceased. But she was asthmatic which was probably neurotic I think partly, however she was asthmatic. And she married…twice she was married. The first marriage ended up in a divorce and the second time she married a retired (oh he wasn't retired; he was a divorcee or a widower)

37:30 public servant, and they lived at Kirribilli.

Before World War Two, what were your memories of Anzac Day?

Oh it was not so much as it is now. I was at Scots. I got in the school choir with my rendition of 'Land of Hope and Glory' so on Anzac Day, we had to get dressed

38:00 up in a white collar and so forth and go up to St Stephens church in Macquarie Street (not in Macquarie Street, in Phillip Street in those days. It was later on moved) and we saw the Anzac Day procession in the process of going in and out but it was just a procession as far as I was concerned. We had to go to the school of course and then they read out at school the names of the schoolboys who had gone to the First World War.

38:30 That was read out. It wasn't so much as it is now.

I'll just pause you there Tom because what we're going to do is change tapes.

Tape 2

00:43 **Tom, just a few more questions about Anzac Day?**

Yeah

So was Anzac Day a public holiday before World War Two?

Yes it was, I believe and I'm sure about this. We use to get a public holiday on the Prince of Wales'

01:00 birthday before 1920's but he got us to change it to Anzac Day.

When was the Prince of….?

Oh about 1920. I remember seeing him come in. He came out on the battleship the [HMS] Renown. And I say Central Avenue, my mother and her sister and I went down to the

01:30 end of the avenue and watched the ship come through the heads. I just remember as the ship's coming through the heads. And of course later on I saw the Renown during the war quite a bit however.

Excellent. Anzac Day did school cadets; did you march and hold banners?

No we didn't, we didn't. Nowadays they've got Scot's College Pipe Band. [It's] one of the bands that take part

02:00 in the Anzac Day ceremony. Get round twice as a matter a fact. I use to march on Anzac Day til a few years ago. With the organization I was a member of, still am. Going around once was enough for me. These poor kids had to go round twice carrying all the bagpipes and so forth.

02:30 **Were you ever reminded of your father's sacrifice?**

No, I knew he got killed and but no, I was never sort of reminded by being spoken to about it. He was

03:00 killed. His brother was [a] prisoner of war in Germany, having been partly gassed in the First World War in the Somme and his brother-in-law was in the AIF too, in the Army Medical Corps. But his other brother and sister were much too young to go to the war.

And you had no interest then in the army since your family had such great traditions?

No,

03:30 not at all. I was a boatman.

Just coming back onto St Thomas's North Sydney, what are your memories of that particular church?

Oh nothing special really, Michael [interviewer]. It wasn't a very big church. All you saw was a big church. I remember going there on occasions and just a church as far as I was concerned.

And was your mum married there?

04:00 Not the first time, but the second time she was. The first time she was married at Christ Church St Lawrence in George Street. My father's family were mostly Catholic and his mother was a very staunch Catholic and they were married in a Church of England. It was a very high church, Christ Church St Lawrence it was sort of half Catholic, but my grandma

04:30 wouldn't go. No, when her son was married, she wouldn't go in the Church of England. So there we were. But that sort of attitude has changed a lot these days fortunately. Has changed a lot.

So there was no particular reason why your mum sent you to Scots instead of Shore being Shore an Anglican School and Scots?

No except that

05:00 Scots was much closer. Much closer. But in those days it was much different to what it is now. Much different. Nowadays the library at Scots is quite a big building, a couple of storeys high. In my day the library was a cupboard in the English Master's room

05:30 with a few books in it. That's a spare cupboard.

So how did your mum afford the school fees of Scots?

Oh she got the war widow's pension and my stepfather of course. He had a decent sort of a business even though the Depression hit him rather badly. Nevertheless, Scots nowadays, I would have had no chance sending any of my people to

06:00 Scots, the fees are that high. Much too high I think, although schools are subsidised by the Government. Mr Howard [Prime Minister] gets tic tac toe about that.

So your stepfather helped subsidise some of your costs?

Oh yes he did, he did.

What did you like and admire about him?

Oh just in general, I liked him in

06:30 general. And he always looked after me very well. Lots of kids get upset about stepfathers or stepmothers but not in my case. I've no complaints.

Can you give me an example of how he looked after you and cared for you?

Oh not particularly. He didn't upset me, put it that way.

Now you've mentioned his business was hit hard by the Depression?

Oh yes.

07:00 He had a place in Sussex Street, Sydney and his partner died and then he died in 1950. My mother sold the business to Melbourne Steamship Company and they sold out to Howard Smith later on and they sold out to people called Halliday Brothers and they sold the property and it's been made into a, I think it's called 'The Chelsea' now. It's a block of units

07:30 or offices and so forth.

So what are your memories of the Depression years?

Oh gee, the number of people unemployed. I can remember people being tossed out of their houses because they couldn't pay their rent. Actually evicted, chucked their stuff out on the footpath.

Especially around Paddington. I was working at Bondi Junction as an apprentice and

Paddington was full of empty houses. Nowadays it's quite a trendy suburb but in those days it was quite the reverse. Oh there were great troubles, industrial troubles. A big coal strike up in Newcastle and a chap called Weaver was the Minister for Mines I think. [Reginald Weaver, Secretary for Mines and Minister for Forests 1929-1930] He led a party of volunteers up there to work this coal mine

and the owner of the mine, John Brown, refused to pay the award wage and he had plenty of coal that was still underground. And the miners went up there to get their jobs back and this bloke, he brought a whole lot of volunteers (they weren't coalminers) and the police opened fire on them. They killed two miners at Newcastle. At the Newcastle Trade's Hall, there's a plaque there with the names of these two

people that were killed by the police at Rothbury. And there was also a big timber workers' strike; there was all sorts of industrial troubles. The people were, well the wages were down to a pittance and a lot of employees weren't even paid that. Fortunately I was fortunate that Washington Souls paid award wages. Lots of chemists didn't. You know, get

people to come in and work on Sunday and so forth and not pay them, that sort of thing. Or make them work after hours and not pay them.

Was this because employers were greedy or they had no money?

Oh both. They were all greedy. But of course business was, generally speaking, slow. One of the things in the Depression was, people who lost their jobs

couldn't buy their groceries and so forth and the grocer had to put some of his staff off too and the thing snowballed. And in 1933, the year I left school, one in three, the unemployment was one in three. Now it's about 5 percent or something isn't it? One in three! And of course there were so many women employed in those days. Lots of jobs they had,

well until the (UNCLEAR) for example just didn't exist, so those sort of jobs just weren't there to take.

Do you remember when the Depression started and how it affected yourself and your house?

Oh it sort of started gradually, I'd say about 1929, 1930, thereabouts. There was a great crash in America on the stock market. I'm not sure if it was 29 or 30 and that was more or less the start of it

but it had been gradually coming up to that beforehand.

So did you notice your stepdad or your mum cutting back on what they were buying and….?

Oh yes, we had a motorcar, he was a wealthy man. Oh yes, we generally were able to have a maid live in. My stepfather thought if we'd employed a maid,

it was somebody getting a job which it was. I suppose he was good in that way. But his own business went down to blazes. He had fifty or sixty men working at his works, quite a few of them on outside jobs. They were working on ships and so forth, but he was down to about half a dozen just looking after the machinery, making sure that things were O.K. In fact, one man use to be sent out to our house to cut the lawn

once a week. He was a mechanic, a ship's fitter and turner. The old man kept him in something to do. Go and cut the lawn.

So your stepdad did try and keep people employed?

Oh yes. There was a crowd of people living at Happy Valley down at La Perouse. There was vacant ground, people having lost their homes or

been tossed out of their homes and they were out there living in huts and humpies and goodness knows what and he used to go, he was one of the people that used to go and take them loads of vegetables and that sort of thing to help them out. Very often on a Saturday go to the markets and he'd buy a whole lot of vegetables and take them out to Happy Valley there.

Just to help people out?

Oh yes,

And your stepdad,

he paid award wages?

Oh as far as I know he did, as far as I know.

He didn't have any union problem or anything like that?

No, none at all. But lots of employers did.

How were you able to get a job during that sort of tense time?

Well it wasn't for a while. I left school at the end of '33 and I was, as I say, getting into chemistry.

13:30 I thought it was industrial chemistry but it was pharmacy. I had to get an apprenticeship and then you went to university too. And so I went to Washington Souls. In fact my grandmother, grandparents at Lewisham lived next door to a chap, Corey Yates Well Yates was the manager of Washington Souls in town so of course she dropped in, went to Mr Yates and said I'd like a job

14:00 and he was, got me as an apprenticeship there. And so I left school and there was no job for about the next eight or nine months then I started at Washington Souls.

Was your mum worried at all or was it just part of life?

I don't know. I don't really know.

During this time since there's so many people unemployed, was there much theft and robbery going on?

I don't know really. A lot of curious coins, two shilling pieces. People use to make them and at the shop we had a gadget that would put the coin on and bend it. If it was a bad one, of course it would break, but unfortunately if you pushed hard enough real ones would break.

15:00 That would upset the customers.

So how did they make these coins?

Oh, they were people who were trained as foundries and that sort of thing. They use to make these, they looked alright too. They use to get a mould, make a mould and pour the molten metal into it. And pass them off.

15:30 **And then, so when did the pharmacy and people start to realise that there were fake coins going around?**

Oh it was well known. Each shop had a little gadget. You put the coin in and you've got to squish it and, as I said, push hard enough and you bent a good one too. So we, we eventually gave those gadgets away.

But you couldn't tell the coin just by looking at it?

No,

16:00 no you couldn't. They were well made.

So someone totally innocent could come in with one of these coins that a shopkeeper from a previous shop had given them? Is that right?

Oh yeah. That was right.

What about cash registers. Did you have those sorts of things?

Yes our cash registers were quite different to what they are now. They were electric cash registers or some had a handle

16:30 you turned at the side to work them. Most were electric in those days. And if the electricity packed up, which often happened, you use to put the handle in and wind it around. And nowadays, you can't do that at all.

And plumbing? Had sewerage come in to where you were working?

Oh yes, we had sewerage at Bondi Junction. I started originally at Bondi Junction branch

17:00 which in those days was on the corner of Avoca Street and Bronte Road. It's now a bank I think. It looked a tremendous shop from the outside. A real big window. It went right round the corner. It was a terrible place inside, very small inside, shocking, but it looked fantastic from the outside.

And what sort of things did people buy from the pharmacy, what sort of drugs were people…?

17:30 Well, we use to sell a lot of packages of drugs in those days, one ounce of this and one ounce of that, that sort of thing. People use to make up their own remedies to a degree. Now the first job of a first year apprentice was to pack up these little packages of drugs. Epsom salts and Clover salts and Henna Powder and Senna powder all these things, they were quite common in those days. But

18:00 in the way of ordinary medicines, of course there wasn't television advertising. [There was] radio advertising and they thought that was great. They said on the radio, 'This is good for you.' People were very worried about their bowels. That was a big part of our business, various bowel preparations.

Can you give me an example of what people would do to

18:30 **fix up their bowels?**

Oh we used paraffin oil, they used stuff called Agarol, they watched their diet. They told you all about it.

Cause people today are really preoccupied with diets and losing weight. Was that the same back then?

Well not so much the diet. Losing weight, yes a little bit because in those days they use to take thyroid tablets to lose weight. Now it's forbidden. You can't sell thyroid tablets over the counter

19:00 now, but in those days you could. And they use to take various strengths of thyroid tablet to bring their weight down.

Did it work, the thyroid tablets?

Oh yes it probably did, but it had a few side effects too which were bad so they cut them out.

Such as what, what side effects?

Oh getting, mucking up your thyroid growth preparation. Then of course

19:30 photography came into it too. Kodak brought out the Kodak Brownie Camera and that made photography quite common. And we used to do, it's black and white photography not coloured, they used to do their own developing and printing in those days. You could buy sets to develop and print your own negatives and positives and so forth. And it was quite a big business.

20:00 Nowadays photography is all coloured photography. To get a black and white job…I sent my grandson in with a black and white negative last week to get it printed and he's going to have trouble. I told him where to go, he'll be OK, but they make quite a business out it. "Oh", they say. 'It's black and white then."

So pharmacies back then, the major part of their business was photography,

20:30 **the buying and selling of films..?**

Yes, yes

Cameras as well?

Oh yes, cameras were mostly Kodak cameras. But there was no single lens reflex cameras, [just] those box cameras or folding cameras. In fact, Kodak bought out a thing called a Baby Brownie. A little bakelite one. I think it cost six shillings. It took a

21:00 roll of 127 size film. But nowadays of course, they use single lens reflex cameras with telescopic lenses on them, all sorts of things.

So did you get into photography yourself?

I used to do a bit of my own developing and printing but not very well. But I had a go at it.

Now you mentioned that when you joined the navy you were getting two shillings initially

21:30 Yeah.

and then four. How much were you getting paid at the pharmacy?

Let me see, the pharmacy wages, I was getting five pounds a week.

Oh, OK and how was tax taken out from the government?

Oh it was, you didn't pay every week like you do now. Just the end of the year, put a taxation return in. And the taxation wasn't so heavy. I can't remember now exactly how much

22:00 tax you did pay. Of course it was much different to what it is now. They brought in sales tax in the Depression. Sales tax was on wholesale prices of goods and of course the retailer added his profit onto that and you never knew how much sales tax you paid really. But it wasn't… about 5 percent I think on the wholesale price.

22:30 And then they put up the sales tax at various times. It was mostly later on cosmetics and that type of preparation. Cosmetics and stuff that wasn't really necessary for health. But now of course the GST [Goods and Services Tax] has taken the place of all of that. Quite different.

So when sales tax came in, did people start to complain about the inflated prices?

Probably, I don't remember that particularly. But sales tax was always put on between the wholesaler and the retailer. You got graded in sales tax of so much and that was the stage at which it was paid. But now of course it's

23:30 marked on the GST, which is on the retail price which is different to wholesale price.

Excellent. Now war's starting to brew in Europe?

Oh yeah.

The Nazi Party's on the rise…

Trouble in Spain, there was a civil war

What did you know back in Australia about Spain?

Only what we read in the newspapers, that's all. A lot of propaganda came across, a lot of propaganda. But the Spanish Civil War…

24:00 Was the King of Spain had abdicated and the people running Spain were more of a Left organization and they'd helped the Spanish people in many ways. But then the Spanish Civil War broke out when one of the Spanish Governors, a bloke called Franco [General Francisco Franco], started a revolution and the Catholic Church backed him

24:30 and the Nazi Party in Germany backed him. The Communists in Russia backed the left hand. But anyway it went on for years [1936-1939].

Did the Australian Catholic Church support him?

Yes, I worked for a Catholic boss and we use to get told of what they said. Oh yes it was quite a

25:00 division there but the British Navy got involved, mostly on rescuing people and picking up British civilians that were in Spain, that sort of thing. And some of the Nazis, one of the Nazis bombed Spanish towns and they torpedoed some ships.

Again, before World War

25:30 **Two, what did Australians think of the Germans and the Nazi's?**

Didn't like them.. Hitler, of course, (Germany was in a bit of a bad state financially I think) got them all on his side in Germany with special work battalions and that sort of thing.

26:00 And also he started having submarines built overseas in places like Finland. And also aircraft, the German weren't supposed to have any aircraft after World War One but they did and they had a very good air force. Very good in fact. Better than the Brits had when the war started.

So 1936 was the Olympic Games

Yeah

in Germany?

In Germany, oh yeah. That was a great

26:30 political exercise too. In fact Hitler was very much upset about coloured people, Chinese and Negroes and so forth and one American Negro, I forget his name now [Cornelius Johnson], he won the [high jump]…He was a great athlete and Hitler wouldn't recognise him, wouldn't recognise at all. They use to march past the, put up the winners on but

27:00 Hitler just went ……

So were you receiving news about the Olympic Games in 1936?

Yes, we were yeah.

What news did you receive about the Australians competing and what was going on?

Not a great deal. Not a great deal, Michael. Of course sport wasn't organised the way it is now, not by a long way. Sponsorship is a big thing in sport these days.

27:30 The Olympic Games were restricted to amateurs. I can remember in the 1960's it could have been, I was involved in sailing of course and not the Olympic Games but I was a member of the sailing club. We were notified by the Australian Yachting Federation if anybody took part in a sailing race and received five pounds prize money, they were declared a professional.

28:00 I heard a chap being interviewed on radio, on television after the last Games [Olympic Games] and he said his income was only $100,000 a year and it was a bit of a battle by the time he paid his coach and his this and his that, complaining. So it's no longer amateur, not by a long way.

And finally just

28:30 **in respect to sport, did you follow the cricket and Bradman [Don Bradman – famous Australian cricketer]?**

Oh yes I did. I did follow the cricket. In fact, I must confess that I dodged school one day to watch Harold Larwood play [English fast bowler]. I used to do the bowling. I wasn't very good at cricket. I was mad keen on cricket. I was a fast bowler and so was Larwood. He was the bodyline expert. So I went out to the cricket ground on

29:00 a school day to watch Larwood bowl. He was the same height as I was, 5 foot 6 [inches]. And I watched him very carefully. I thought he was great but I didn't like his tactics. Of course his tactics were dictated by his skipper, [Douglas] Jardine, as the bloke who started the trouble there, however I watched him.

29:30 **And did you get in trouble for skipping a day of school?**

No, they never found out.

So war begins, where were you when the war was declared?

Gee, good question. I'm not actually sure. I remember

30:00 it being declared on the radio. We had a radio. In those days it was called a wireless set and it was quite a big instrument, about the size of a refrigerator, quite a piece of furniture and all the various stations on it. And I heard old Menzies [Sir Robert Menzies] who was the Prime Minister at the time, say we were at war with Germany.

30:30 **Just before I get onto the war, did you listen to other radio programs growing up, on this huge wireless?**

Oh my stepfather was mad keen on the wrestling.

Really?

He used to listen to the wrestling every Saturday night and also they used to broadcast the cricket in Britain, the test matches. It was done in a very smart way because

31:00 the radio at the time wouldn't transmit over that distance from Britain to Australia. Radio was always done by Morse Code and they use to send messages from Britain through the cable via Morse Code and they'd be then relayed again from a station in Sydney and the commentator would tap his pencil and make it sound like a ball being hit. It was

31:30 pretty well done but people thought it was straight from Britain but it wasn't by a long way. There was always a delay because the time they got the message through re-broadcasted, two or three minutes had elapsed. Probably an over [a cricket over] had elapsed.

Did you listen to other or the wrestling yourself or "Dad and Dave" [a popular radio comedy at the time]?

Oh occasionally, mostly fake too, I'm afraid.

32:00 **Now you've shared with me when war broke out, since your mum had lost your dad in the First World War what was her response when she heard about it?**

She didn't make any response at all. They didn't…. Wasn't surprised, but she went quiet about it.

Was she totally against you being involved in any way?

Oh to a degree yes. Couldn't do

32:30 much better.

So the war is started, what did you do then? In respect to joining the army, navy, airforce what were your steps?

No I just get into the navy. I started, had a go at trying to get into Rushcutters Bay anti-submarine school but I couldn't. Then I joined up this Yachtsman's Scheme later on in early 1940. But

33:00 we had to go, at one stage go down to Rushcutters Bay at the Drill Hall for a medical examination. And the Drill Hall at Rushcutters Bay is still there. It's an ancient building, it was full of cracks and crevices, real drafty. It was a cold stinking night we were down there and they said, "Righto get all your gear off." and we all stripped off and sat down there hanging in the closet.

33:30 And the doctor came about 9 o'clock at night, we were stone cold and he looked at all the people and went up before the chief who was in charge and there was another chap called Martin down there. He had rather a effeminate manner this bloke, I don't know, I've never seen him before so he went up to the GP [General Practitioner] officer and said, "Do you want to join the navy?" He said, "I don't know

34:00 whether I do or whether I don't, I cant make up my mind". So I won't repeat with the GP officer told him but he fled. He had enough sense, he didn't come back. He had enough sense.

His mind was made up for him?

Yes. Oh dear.

So before you actually went to enlist, did you get together with a few mates to talk about stuff?

34:30 Yes, when one of my friends came with me he was going, he was in the militia and he went down in his militia uniform and they scrubbed him straight away. He got in later on in the navy but that was a year later.

They scrubbed him because he was in an army…?

That's right, they didn't want to pinch people from other forces in those days. And so he was a year later getting into the navy.

35:00 **When they asked you at Rushcutters Bay when you went to enlist, what reasons did you give for enlisting?**

They didn't ask you about reasons.

And what medical things did they take you through?

Oh general medical examinations. One thing you couldn't have,

35:30 you couldn't have piles [haemorrhoids] for example. That was quite important. They could soon find out whether you had piles or not but I don't think they did.

So did you enlist with any friends at the time?

Not particularly, no. When my mate got knocked back, I didn't know anybody in the group. Fifty-eight of us went overseas in the first group to Britain.

36:00 **So when did you actually, what date was it that actually went to enlist?**

Oh it would have been, I suppose, June 1940 and we went away in September 1940 in the Strathnaver.

Was that the first intake of enlistments or did they start in 1939?

Oh they started…In 1930, the navy had a naval reserve of people who use to go,

36:30 like the militia in the army, but they got called up straight away in navy reserve. Didn't muck about with them, they were in. They got a telegram to report to Rushcutters Bay or wherever at a certain time.

So before the war, when you were working at the pharmacy, did you ever think of joining the naval reserve?

I did, but the trouble was that my work hours and the naval reserve hours didn't coincide

37:00 sufficiently and the company wouldn't give me time off to I'm sure they (UNCLEAR)

So what were the hours, what were your work hours and what were the naval reserve?

Oh I was working in those days forty-four hours a week plus and I still had to work on Saturday morning, frequently Saturday evening and Sunday evening too. And of course late on Friday night was late night shopping.

So we're talking seven days a week?

37:30 Well sometimes, yeah. If you worked on Saturday, you got an afternoon off.

And then what was required if you were in the naval reserve, what hours were required there?

Oh at least one night a week, plus a week training or a fortnight training as well which , in those [days] we only use to get annual holidays for a fortnight on half pay.

38:00 In other words you were entitled to a week's annual holiday but they gave you an extra week on no pay so you eventually got a fortnight on half pay.

When you joined the navy did you think it was going to be a great adventure?

Oh I suppose we did. We thought the war would last three years perhaps maybe, but we didn't think so.

38:30 It was quite a culture shock.

So you joined in June 1940, I take it. Did you resign from the pharmacy?

Oh I did, yes.

What was their response?

Oh no response. Well they did make up my wages to a degree. I was paid so much extra above the two bob [shillings] a day.

For the entire war or just….?

Yes

39:00 they did do that for me and of course gave me my job back after the war when I was demobilised.

And when you told your mum that you'd enlisted what did she say to do?

She didn't say anything at all. No, she didn't say yes or no. She wasn't going to do much about it or couldn't do much about it. At that stage I was

39:30 twenty-three, a real old bloke.

Do what you want then.

Yeah.

Tape 3

00:42 **What happened next after you joined the navy, what was the next step?**

I got told to muster at Rushcutters Bay at a certain time in the morning, We hadn't got any uniforms at this stage.

01:00 In fact we didn't have any uniforms until we got to Britain. We had to bring certain clothing and we mustered down there. We were given a small amount of money, put on a bus the down to 20 Pyrmont, put on the Strathnaver and she sailed at one o'clock.

How quickly did this happen after the….?

Oh very quickly. We sailed at one o'clock. And with that there was a chap called Page with our draft. His old man was

01:30 a Member or Parliament. Going out the heads he pulled out his keys and he said, "I'll never lose these again." and he threw them over the side, his house keys. They're still there as far as I know. We got to Britain.

What did you know about where you were going or what did sort of leave did you get?

We went around the Cape [Cape of Good Hope]. We went to Melbourne, Adelaide, Fremantle

02:00 and picked up some more of our draft. It made it up to fifty-eight altogether and then to Durban, Cape Town, Freetown, then Liverpool up round the North of Ireland and down past the Scottish coast there to Liverpool.

How did you feel to be getting on this ship? What did you feel about going overseas?

Only that I knew it was going to happen. See at that stage she wasn't, she

02:30 was partly a troop ship. We had a few passengers onboard too. We were, they were first class, we weren't first class.

What chance did you get to say goodbye to your family?

Oh just at Rushcutters Bay. My sister climbed on the bus when she was saying goodbye and that was it. They came to Rushcutters Bay and so'd everyone's

03:00 family and the ship sailed.

What were the emotions like for your mother and sister, saying goodbye?

Oh they didn't show very much. My sister was more concerned I think. She was apt to be a bit emotional.

What about your own emotions? Were you excited or frightened?

Oh excited because we knew where we were going. Frightened…well

03:30 no, not at that stage. Anybody who wasn't frightened during the war never saw a shot fired.

What about on the way over, what were the conditions like on this ship? You "weren't first class" what were you?

Oh no, we were second-class. We had four in the cabin, the cabins were for two, we had extra ones put in. Four blokes in the cabin.

04:00 The chaps I was with was a fellow called Harry Woods, he was an accountant from Port Kembla; chap called Menzies, he was a medical student and his father got him out of the navy later on because his brother Guy Menzies who was a well known early aviator got killed and he got this chap out. And the fellow, a bloke called Cutts, and he didn't survive the war.

04:30 **And where did you meet these fellows?**

Only in the ship, when we joined the ship.

What sort of things did you do onboard?

Well there were a whole lot, there were fifty-eight in our group and there were other people going across too, other naval people. The early part of the crew were the [UNCLEAR] were going across to pick up the ship, a whole lot of other anti-submarine ratings going across,

05:00 a couple of officers in charge of us. And we were given PT [Physical Training], physical exercises on the ship and that sort of thing, made to keep watches. We were put on the upper deck to look out for submarines and assist the crew generally that way.

What naval training had you had before getting onboard this ship?

None at all. Except what we may have picked up, you know, from reading books and so forth.

05:30 **What did you find difficult then about being in the navy then…?**

Well nothing particularly difficult, it was mostly a lot of new of course. We went to a place in Britain, HMS Collingwood, just outside, near Portsmouth. And we did training there; we got issued with a kit there. We hadn't been kitted up at that stage. And we were given training

06:00 in gunnery, training in general naval training and then we were put in various ships.

I'll ask a bit more about that training in a second but just on your way over, this was your first time on a ship out at sea, how did you fare?

Well of course there was blackout, it was blackout at sea because of submarines and raiders and so forth. There was a raider,

06:30 a German raider in the Pacific loose and she'd picked up a New Zealand passenger ship and she'd shelled it and of course the ship was sunk and so forth. But so we were mustered on the Strathnaver and told about this and we were to form certain parties, if ever we were shelled, people would take casualties into the sick bay on the ship and the doctor in charge

07:00 said, "If you see a man who's got both legs knocked off, don't bring him, just leave him there. He's going to die at any rate." That upset some of the boys. Don't waste time on him, he's gone.

What drills or alarms or enemy action did you see on the way over?

None at all.

Were there any alerts or

07:30 **action stations?**

Yes we had a little slight alert in Freetown in Africa. There'd been a battle there, Battle of Dakar and that upset the free French and a few aircraft used to, flew over Freetown at night but nothing eventuated. Watch out for submarines of course all the way. We went from Freetown over towards America and sort of diagonally and across

08:00 onto the west of Scotland and down there to Liverpool. We got to Liverpool and there was action there. We approached Liverpool and a destroyer came whizzing out flying AAA on his Morse lamp which we could see and there was a raid on at Liverpool that was where we were meant to anchor. We anchored off Liverpool Bay and in the morning there was dozens of ships there, dozens of ships, so we went in in the morning and Liverpool was badly raided that night.

08:30 We got a near miss on the Strathnaver, we bumped up and down.

What did you see of the raid from the ship?

Well we were in the River Mersey. We were just moored in the river and under a big French ship called the Pasteur. Between the two of us, was a destroyer moored. We thought it was a funny place for a destroyer. We knew later on why.

09:00 His job was to shoot down the flares and he did a good job on them at night. We got off the ship the next day about lunchtime and they said we'll eat at Birmingham. Well thirty years later I got to Birmingham because we got mucked about by air raids all the way across Britain. We passed a train

09:30 on a siding and one of my chaps said, "Oh you know we're pretty safe now we're ashore." and somebody said, "What about that train over there?" It was full of bullet holes. And I said, "What happened to the passengers, I wonder?" That quietened him down.

As you say you had a bit of a harsh introduction to Britain. What were your first impressions of this place at war?

Well we were on

10:00 trains. Even if a raid started, the trains would slow down. If the raid got very intense in the area, they'd stop. We were over the Midlands that night. It stopped and goodness knows where we were. And we actually got to Portsmouth the next morning.

What happened to Birmingham?

I don't know.

10:30 Birmingham was badly bombed later on but we didn't get our meal there.

How did your own nerves shape up to being in a place where you were under air raid?

Oh gee, well you took cover. I remember being in Malta later on and an air raid started

11:00 and I took cover in a ruined building that had been knocked about. Was an old Maltese bloke there too and I said to this chap, "Now what would happen if one of these aircraft that are flying about on top got hit and the pilot bailed out in a parachute, what would happen when he got to the ground?" And the old bloke said to me, "It's no good anymore. The police get them first." So I didn't pursue that question.

11:30 **We'll come back to Malta in a little while. Just on your first impressions of England. What was the atmosphere like in the population in England at that time in the war?**

Very good. It was badly bombed of course. In the underground railways, there was places marked out on the platforms for people to sleep in of night. A lot of houses were damaged and destroyed, a lot of houses.

12:00 I went ashore, early night, I went into Portsmouth the first time, just on leave from the training place where we got a couple of hours leave. And whilst I was there, a message came up on the screen the air raid siren is sounding, if you want to take cover, do it now. And I thought this is going to be good. They'll be people running everywhere. Nobody moved. They just stood. They were

12:30 very good, very good that way. They were very heavily bombed later in Portsmouth, very heavily bombed.

What dealings did you have with the local population?

Oh not much at all. Only the people… other members of the ship's company, were British, most of them were British. Some of them you found….they're a weird mob.

13:00 [There were a] few Dutchmen onboard.

Well what did you have to do when you arrived at Portsmouth? What happened next?

We were taken to a training place and we were kitted up there. We were divided in various, we were trained in general seamanship, gunnery, marching up and down.

What was your kit? What were you kitted up with, what

13:30 **uniform or…?**

Oh naval uniform (you got paid several pence a day) you were given your first kit, complete kit. You were paid seven pence a day kit upkeep allowance, which you had to keep your kit up to. Unfortunately when the ship was sunk later, I lost all my kit of course and I got trouble getting it replaced. And they couldn't replace it all as I was out in the Mediterranean so my kit was not very good at the end.

14:00 **What was in that kit, can you describe the different things you were given?**

In the kit you got a blue suit, trousers and a jacket, 2 collars, 2 white fronts. We got a blue sweater, boots, socks.

Just stop for a second.

14:30 Extra long underpants, thick wool and they said, "Gee who'd wear those things?". We did. It was that cold. And a couple of caps.

What sort of caps were they?

Well, round. Well actually they were blue ones, not the white ones, blue ones over there. The white ones in the Mediterranean would have been lighter but

15:00 they were blue caps with HMS on the front.

At this stage were you, was this an RAN, Australian Navy uniform that you had or had you been seconded to the Royal Navy? What was your status?

The same uniform. We got paid fortunately in British money, which is higher than the Australian money, twenty-five percent higher, which was a good thing.

15:30 **What about your conditions at this training camp, what were your, where were you living and what was…?**

Oh in the place itself. It was, the place was built just before the war had started. All the buildings were wood and they were going to make them brick later but however in the early part of the war they got an air raid in the place and the brick buildings that they had made, disintegrated and the wood ones sort of bent a bit and they

16:00 survived. See the brick became a missile so they didn't bother to convert the others.

What did that mean? Were they cold or uncomfortable? What sort of place?

Oh they were all cold and we had a great tank outside each building full of water which froze overnight so you used to have to get up on top and break the ice.

16:30 **And how were you sleeping? Were there bunks or…?**

Oh we had beds in this one, we had hammocks later on at sea. But even in the destroyers, were weren't always allowed to use your hammocks because in a destroyer the hammocks are stowed in the mess deck and the ammunition for the guns comes up through the mess decks so the hammocks were a bit of a nuisance. So the hammocks were

17:00 all stowed away elsewhere and you slept where you could. The leading hand of each mess had the privilege of sleeping on the mess table. I had a great spot. I had a platform beside the mess table, which I lay on with my head to the bow and feet to the stern and there was a winch that hoisted ammunition up to the guns and I could wedge my head in between that and the safe and I couldn't

17:30 roll off, very comfortable.

This was on the Kashmir?

Kashmir yeah.

O.K. we'll talk a bit more about that in a moment. Your introduction to naval training, what did you think about naval discipline and what was that like?

Oh it was all right. They, you did as you were told. It was, well if you didn't do as you were told, you were in trouble.

18:00 The trouble was the bigger the ship, the more bull there was. Because in the smaller ships you were, discipline wasn't so tough, in bigger ships it is.

What were the punishments on land during training? What sort of things would happen to you if you broke the rules?

Well the number one, you use to get "number eleven" punishment for example, well that means you

18:30 had to, you weren't allowed to take leave. You also had to muster at certain times, you weren't allowed to go ashore, you were given jobs to do and then your meal hours and so forth. You're kept busy and if you overstepped your mark you'd finished up in cells, up to ninety days. And in the navy at Garden Island [Sydney], they had a gaol there

19:00 until it was pulled down a few years ago. And people up to ninety days were put in the gaol at Garden Island. Over ninety you went to Long Bay [Gaol].

What was the worst trouble you got into during your early days in the navy?

Fourteen days stoppage of leave and pay.

And why did you get that?

Well I was on leave in Edinburgh and staying at the Victoria League Hostel. I was sharing a room with a number of

19:30 Poles I think they were. Any rate, during the night I noticed these blokes were searching everywhere. They'd had their gear stolen. Well I went through my gear and I always used to wear my money on my money belt next to my skin but I had my pay book in my jacket and that went. So I had to report that to local police and

20:00 come back to Portsmouth and report my pay book missing. In which I finished up before the Commander of Defaulters, not being in possession of pay book. And he said to me, "Where do you come from?" "Australia", I said. "Oh Christ, fourteen days stoppage of leave and pay." So that's what I got. My pay book came back years later,

20:30 oh, after I'd retired, about 1950.

How did you get it back?

It came back.

Just appeared.

Gosh I could have been dead.

What was the reputation of the Australians like amongst the British?

Well they thought we were mad.

They were mad or they thought you were mad?

They thought we were mad.

Why did they think that?

Well the Australians had a habit of, or

21:00 impression of being people who were not used to discipline or they'd be rude. And also they noticed that the Australian ratings were so much taller than the Brits. Because at that point the Brits, especially those born between 1920 and [the war] were generally undernourished but the Australians were much better built and we generally were able to

21:30 beat them in any sort of athletic competition. At rowing, swimming, that sort of thing, we went pretty well.

How did that sporting rivalry translate into day to day life? Was there much tension at all?

No not much, no.

What about the British commanding officers or the people in charge, what were they like?

They were either good

22:00 or bad. The ones that were good were very good, there were some no hopers. A lot of the British appointments in for example in Singapore or Malaysia or Bombay. A British Navy officer who was a bit useless, he'd be sent out to Singapore or Bombay or somewhere. There was quite a bit of that and it was quite noticeable.

22:30 **What were your favourite parts of training? You mentioned you did gunnery and seamanship?**

I don't know that I had special favourites. I don't know.

Can you take us through what you learnt in a bit more detail at Portsmouth? What things you were being trained on?

Well, general gunnery training, breech loaded guns, quick firing guns. Later on I was one of a crew of multiple pom-pom guns.

23:00 Working the gun, loading it, aiming it and of course firing it to get the maximum number of rounds fired of a gun. [Number of] hits fired, hits recorded. But during the war, anti-aircraft gunnery improved

23:30 a lot, a tremendous amount. In fact we had on the Kashmir we had what was called [an] RDF [Radio Direction Finding] set, which became radar later on. It was called a Radio Direction Finding set and this thing worked sometimes. It got some amazing results at times. But later on during the war of course radar become quite a thing and guns were aimed by radar then. I was on the Australia [HMAS Australia]later on and we were

24:00 well equipped with radar then, well equipped.

How did the aiming work before radar?

Oh well ships had what they call a….oh gee, what do they call it? Any rate it had a range finder which ranged on the enemy and you estimated the enemy's speed and his direction

24:30 and you know your speed, and you estimated the windage and this was put down to a transmitting station on the ship, the range, the windage, the speed and you got two figures out. One was the amount that you laid off and your training, that was up and down, and the other was what you laid off on the sideways. That was put under the gunsight and you fired on that

25:00 when it was fired, when the gun fired. It was called 'directed firing'. It was actually fired from up on the bridge not on the…If they were shot away then the gun layer on the turret would fire the gun, aim the gun and fire it.

How many people were in these gun crews that you were being trained on?

Seven.

And can you explain what each person did?

Yeah. The number one was the gun layer,

25:30 he set the left hand side of the gun. Number two was the captain of the gun, he was the breech worker. Number three was the gun trainer. Number four was the sight setter, I think it might have been anyway. Four and five were loading number and there was a sight setter. The sight setter worked on the sight passed down by transmitting station. It was put on the

26:00 actual shell, make it explode at a certain distance from the ship when it was fired.

And how did you work together, who was in charge and….?

Oh number two was the captain of the gun, he was in charge. He was generally gunners mate, petty officer.

And what was your first job?

Well I was, we had two stations, what they call cruising stations

26:30 which is half the gun crews are closed up and the other half are asleep or having a meal. And the other was action station when everybody was closed up on the gun. Well cruising station, I was a member of 4.7 inch gun on the Kashmir, I was just one of the numbers there. And action stations on the pom-pom. I was the bloke who put the safety catches on.

27:00 The model of pom-pom fires ninety rounds per barrel per minute. Very noisy, in fact I've still got tinnitus from it, I can't hear silence.

For someone in the future who's never heard of one of these pom-pom guns, can you describe what a multiple pom-pom looked like and how…?

Yeah, well they were multiples, four barrel and eight barrel. Eight barrels were hydraulically worked. Four barrels were just worked by

27:30 hand, trained or. It was virtually the same sort of thing as a Vickers machine gun but on a bigger scale. It was a 40 mm diameter shell, explosive shell. It weighed two pounds and it went two thousand yards and exploded unless it hit something in the process and exploded then. They were on belts of fourteen shells that was clipped onto the previous belt on the side of the gun.

28:00 There was a brass fittings, you just clipped one belt onto the next belt so the gun once he started firing, the belts went through and the shell the cartridge went down on the deck. And so it would be full of cartridges so we'd get rid of them. The gun was trained by two types of sights; cartwheel sight, which was a round sight with a whole [lot] of crosswires on it and you've got the aircraft

28:30 flying into the middle of it and the other was a gate sight, which was a number of vertical gradients and depending on the speed that you estimate the aircraft at, you put that on that sight. So at three hundred knots which is the speed of a Stuka [German Junkers aircraft] you'd put the on the second row in, getting him from there and then you hit him fortunately. But later on of course they used radar on these things and

29:00 they were much better.

What was the safety catch job, can you explain that?

Yeah. The safety catch stopped the shells going into the…now the trouble with the pom-pom is if you've been firing a pop-pom and you stop firing, one trigger would have gone half way forward, it's gone past the safety catch. So if you go and bump that gun it'll probably fire.

29:30 In fact we had a case in the Kashmir, a kid nearly got his head blown off and he went up on the gun deck to clean the gun and we'd been firing, stopped the gun and as he stepped on the gun gate, she fired and for some reason the shell missed him, just missed him and hit the funnel of the ship, a great hole in the funnel.

How did the safety catch work?

Just stopped

30:00 it, just leaned up against the belt. On one occasion I was, got myself into trouble because we were going down the south of Britain and [a] Dornier flying boat, Dornier bomber came across us in the opposite direction. He was a dead duck this bloke. He was flying nice and steady, not very far away, we couldn't help missing him,

30:30 and those other guns too. And I threw the catches in but unfortunately the captain of the gun had already fiddled them and I thought they were safe and of course they fired the gun but she didn't fire. We ended up (UNCLEAR) in the hand and hand working it but by that time the aircraft was halfway, a long way away. There was like an inquiry into that.

31:00 **What happened to you after that, did you get in trouble?**

Oh no I got ticked off but there we were. "Don't do it again," sort of thing.

We'll come back to the Kashmir in just a moment. I just want to ask a couple more questions about training. You were also given signals training?

Oh not a great deal at this stage. Later on, yes. In the Officers' Training School I did. You had to train with a Morse Lamp or a [UNCLEAR]or a

31:30 Morse buzzer but at this stage, no.

What about drill or small arms, what sort of training?

Oh yes plenty of that.

Can you explain the drill for us?

Ordinary parade ground drill plus drilling on the rifle range. I wasn't very keen on parade ground drill. I don't know why.

32:00 **You weren't so keen on it, what do you….?**

Oh it was just useless, I mean. Later on I was asked to write an essay on Parade Ground Drill and I told what I thought was the truth. That didn't get many marks either. Oh I reckon this training, drilling is beaut for Grenadiers Guards and so forth if you want to put him on display but ordinary

32:30 sailors, well…. I said we're better off learning (UNCLEAR) navigation I reckon than marching up and down.

What training did you get as far as seamanship or …?

Oh general seamanship training.

What did that involve?

Working in, being lowered away in the sea boat and so forth. General work about the ship,

33:00 looking after the ship.

How did the recruits that you were with take to this training?

Oh they did all right, they did all right. One chap was, I won't mention his name, he joined us in Western Australia and he was pretty useless and we were all formed up in two groups at right angles to

33:30 one another in Portsmouth in the barracks. And the commodore of the barracks was poking around and the gunner's mate charged, decided he'd make a show of the Australians. So he gave the order to slope arms which you put your rifle up on the left shoulder and for some reason this bloke, I don't know how he did it, got his rifle on the right shoulder and obviously something is wrong.

34:00 The gunner's mate nearly had a seizure. The commodore wasn't impressed either.

What other things apart from the drill, what things surprised you about the way the navy operated when you first went in?

Nothing really surprised me. I had a rough idea of how they operated.

34:30 Now on a ship for example, the ship's divided into two watches, port watch and starboard watch. Some ships are in three watches, that's unusual. That means that half your ship's crew is on duty and half is sleeping or eating or something like that. Half your guns crews are closed up. Also ships are divided into different parts there's the fo'c'sle, the quarterdeck, and

35:00 the main top and the forward top. That part of the ship is looked after by the people who are mainly forward top and normally, they actually look after the ship and by cleaning up and looking after various jobs on that part of the ship. So that was OK. And each mess in those days use to have a cook in the mess, or two cooks in the mess, appointed every day and they use to take the food down to the galley and get it cooked,

35:30 pick it up when it was cooked and bring it back and dish it out to the sailors. That's all changed now because the navy's all American these days as far as I can see. And cooking is a bit different. And also don't have hammocks anymore. They have bunks.

Where were you on the Kashmir, what…?

I was what they call a quarterdeck man. Starboard watch quarterdeck man. And

36:00 we looked after the aft part of the ship. Roughly aft's a third of it as far as cleaning the ship and painting it and all that sort of general work.

Well let's talk about the Kashmir. How did you end up joining this ship? What happened at the end of your training in Portsmouth?

Well, we were given lists of people to various ships. Now four of our blokes went to the Hood [HMS Hood] and

36:30 they were the unfortunate four, they didn't survive. We lost about, we lost others too but there were four on the Hood. But we joined the Kashmir at Plymouth. Caught a train from Portsmouth down to Plymouth, got there late in the afternoon. Reported to the naval chap in charge of the naval barracks there and he said, "Yes, she's the duty destroyer." So

37:00 They had a destroyer flotilla. Six boats in those days were in the flotilla. And each day there's a duty destroyer. Now she'd be just inside the breakwater at Plymouth ready to go, five minutes notice, steam up, everything. Slip rope on the buoy, gangways up, boats onboard. So this is nine o'clock at night we went down to the Kashmir, duty destroyer, black out on.

37:30 We'd never seen the ship before. Here she is, ready to go. And the gangway was up, so we went out on a motorboat from the barracks, scrambled up the ships on a rope ladder, tripped over everything on the way. The quartermaster had a little blue light and he sort of shone it for us, a small blue light and we were taken up to the ship's torpedo Coxswain. There was seven of us at this stage,

38:00 Australians, and he said, "Now it's quarter to nine." " Yeah?" "Well", he said, "now at nine o'clock we might be going to sea. If we're still here at five past nine we're not going to sea tonight." Although there was a German cruiser called the Von Hipper in Brest Harbour and she was going to go out and have a go at some of our convoys but, depending on what the French Resistance mob managed to get

38:30 through [would determine] whether she sailed or not. Well we would have been completely useless. I've never seen the ship before, blackout and we were more trouble than anything else on the ship. And we didn't go to sea that night fortunately. The next night we were mustered on the upper deck and told what our jobs were and ...

I'll find out a bit more about that but we have to change the tape so we'll stop for a second.

Tape 4

00:40 **Just before we talk about what happened when you joined the Kashmir, I just want to go back and ask one question. You were part of the Yachtsmen's Scheme. Can you explain to us in a bit more detail, what that involved?**

Oh yes the navy had, well the Royal Navy had

01:00 a need, a requirement for people with small boat experience for motor torpedo boats for example or Fairmile type launches, that type of a job. And they advertised for people who'd been involved in sailing or boating generally to join up. So I joined up.

And did that mean you had a smooth ride onto a ship, what advantages did you

01:30 **have being part of that Scheme?**

Not really, except if you behaved yourself and you got a recommend for the ship you went [to] the first one. You'd be sent to the Officers' Training School in Britain and you'd come out as a sub lieutenant. But unfortunately I, other things happened.

We'll find out what happened but what were your ambitions when you joined up? Did you want to become an officer, what did you....?

Oh yes and I was mad keen on motor torpedo boats. I reckon they were going

02:00 to win the war. Get into the motor torpedo boats and there we were.

And you never quite made it?

Never got near one.

But you did make it to the Kashmir, which was a destroyer?

Yes.

Can you tell us, describe a bit more about the ship for us, what you found out once, after the first night when you arrived?

Yeah well she was, she had a crew of two hundred and she was three hundred and fifty feet long, roughly.

02:30 She had six 4.7 inch quick firing guns in twin mountings, a multiple pom-pom, ten torpedo tubes which they took five out later and put an extra anti-aircraft gun in that place. Finished up with five torpedo tubes, a couple of machine guns each side of the bridge, short range machine guns, point 5's, four barrel jobs.

03:00 Later on they put some Oerlikon guns on her, which were Swedish or Swiss guns which were very good for anti-aircraft work. She was attached to the 5th Destroyer Flotilla, that's Louis Mountbatten's Flotilla, there was [all HMS] Kelly, Kashmir, Kipling, Javelin, Jupiter, Jersey and Jackal.

03:30 At the end of the war Kelly was still on deck as was Javelin . The others had all been lost.

What was the role of that flotilla at the time when you joined the Kashmir?

Well, we were based on, at that stage on Plymouth and the Germans that occupied France were sending out destroyers from France to attack the British coastal convoys. Our job was to stop them and also to stop in the invasion forces.

04:00 And later on we did a bit of escorting of minelayers to lay mines in Brest Harbour. The Germans had two battleships called the Sharnhorst and the Gneisenau and they were bottled up in Brest at the time plus the Von Hipper and they later on broke out but that's another story, though. And we chased the Sharnhorst and the Gneisenau all over the Atlantic at one stage. We didn't catch them

04:30 unfortunately. It only lasted five minutes if we had.

So you were operating in the Atlantic all the time?

At that stage, yes. And we (UNCLEAR) run in later on.

What happened the next morning after the night you described when you arrived, what happened the next morning for the new people onboard?

Oh we all were mustered by the first lieutenant, told us what our positions on the ship were, what we're supposed to do

05:00 and we had to report to the petty officer in charge of that section and for our instructions for the day. And I was told I was in pop-pom crew and 4.7 inch guns crew. So I went and spoke to the guns captain and ask what I was to do there.

Who did you join the ship with? You mentioned there were seven Australians? Was it just you?

05:30 No, there was, I was the only bloke from New South Wales. There was a chap called Dusty Rhodes from Melbourne. He got a decoration later on during the war. He had at that stage been the amateur golf champion of Victoria. And he also had a flying license. He served in the Shanghai Six Airforce in some form of capacity and got knocked down and

06:00 was invalided out of it however. A chap called Washington, he was a bank clerk with the National Australia Bank. A chap called Downey, he was a yachtsman, he'd built a boat in Melbourne -he's another fellow. He was also in the bank. Then Bob Fenwick, I don't know what Bob did. I forget now. And Alex Osmond from South Australia.

06:30 Who else? Oh Geoffrey Dan, Geoffrey Dan was an architect under training, university architect. His father was a minister of the Church of England in a Melbourne suburb and Geoffrey was a most immature bloke. He'd gone straight from Melbourne Grammar into the university. And straight from living in the rectory so he wasn't a worldly sort of

07:00 a bloke. However he improved later on, he eventually drank whiskey. It took him years to do it, though. Oh the great thing about the Royal Navy was they use to get a rum ration. Eleven o'clock we'd get a rum ration. We didn't tell them that the Australian Navy didn't have a rum ration, just didn't tell them a thing about that. And we got our rum; it was very nice too, except Geoffrey Dan…

Can you explain

07:30 **in a bit more detail what your status was? Were you still considered Royal Australian Navy while you were onboard the Kashmir?**

Yes. Yes we were paid Australian rates of pay in British money, which is twenty five percent higher than Australian money.

And what was it like to be Australians onboard a British ship?

Oh it was all right, it was all right. We got on all right with them. Some ships there was a bit of

08:00 a problem, but we were OK.

How did the seven of your sort of knit together, as Australians or…?

Well Dusty Rhodes and I use to go ashore together and Geoffrey Dan would tag along if he got a chance. Oh we got along pretty well.

Were you especially close because of your nationality or was it other things about life

08:30 **onboard the ship that, were you working together or….?**

Oh no we did different jobs around the ship. All separate, though. Oh another thing about the Royal

Navy was and the British Forces I think, is lack on initiative in the ranks. For example we had a davit, like quite a big crane thing for hoisting depth charges, ones we throw over.

09:00 And also when we're in harbour, this was taken out of the position and put in another spot to hoist the, to hold the gangway down. So it use to take about four blokes to pick this thing up, it was quite heavy. This day we came into port and she'd been a depth charge holder so [the] petty officer in charge of us told us to take it out and so I took it out and put it down on the deck

09:30 and picked it up again sort of thing. So I said, "Let's put it over there." Well that didn't go down too well because he didn't tell us to. "Who told you to do that?" "Well," I said "that's going to go there." He was upset about that. Cause we used our initiative.

When you got shown to your section and job

10:00 **who was in charge of you, who was your…was it [the] chief petty officer or..?**

Yes petty officer in charge of the forward guns turret that I was in for cruising stations and then the pom-pom gun had a leading seaman who was in charge of the guns crew. But otherwise the petty officer in charge of the part of the ship you were working in, as a quarterdeckman or fo'c'sle man, whatever.

10:30 **Quite often people talk about someone taking them under their wing and looking after them. Who was that figure for you?**

For me? I don't know particularly there was. Oh yes probably you might befriend a bloke, tell him what to do or give him some hints. But I don't particularly notice who it was.

11:00 **How did you get on in the ship for the first time?**

On no, good, no trouble. You just did as you were told but that's about all you could do.

What did you know of the captain and what did you see of him?

He was known as Crash King, H.A. King. He was a commander. Kashmir was the second

11:30 ship of the flotilla. The flotilla leader was Kelly and if she got out of action, the Kashmir would take over as leader of the flotilla and King of course would be the senior captain of the flotilla. He'd be in charge of the flotilla. So he had a great idea about the Hipper [Von Hipper]. We'd attack with torpedos and if that didn't work,

12:00 we'd ram it. He had a special bell for ramming station. You had to lay down on the deck with your head in. Very few would survive, I don't think. We had one destroyer, not ours, the Glowworm in Norway rammed a German ship intentionally but the Glowworm didn't survive, the Captain got the VC [Victoria Cross] and the few crew they picked up (UNCLEAR)

12:30 in German prisoner of war camps. But that was his idea and that's why they called him Crash King.

How did the crew find out about this tactic? Was it announced to them?

Oh it was just generally known, that's what he would do. That's what he was going to do. He must have made some announcement at some time.

What did you see of the captain around the ship?

Oh not a great

13:00 deal. The captain on a warship is a fairly lonely bloke really. He doesn't eat with the officers in the wardroom, he eats separately in his own cabin. Unless he's invited to the wardroom then he can, then it was more or less a formal occasion. Then he would go into the wardroom and eat his meal there. But the captain was a fairly lonely sort of a bloke, bit aloof. Has to be a bit aloof.

Your

13:30 **position, as you mentioned before, you were starboard quarterdeck…**

Yes, quarterdeck man.

Can you describe what your area of the ship was and what you had around you?

Well the quarterdeck of a destroyer is roughly the after third of the ship, there's stern and there's forward. And in that section of the ship is a 4.7 inch gun and there's the magazine

14:00 for that which is down below. There's the quartermaster lobby, a little enclosed space where the quartermaster hangs out in harbour. He's in charge of the ship's gangway, who comes aboard and so forth. There's also the wardroom which is where the officers eat. And the wardroom pantry, where their food is prepared. And the captain's cabin went across the stern of the ship and also the tiller flat, which is the steering

14:30 gear of the ship, that's down there too. We also had two minesweeping winches in the quarterdeck

which was for high speed minesweeping jobs. We never used it whilst I was on the ship except to move the ship by taking a rope round the winch and putting some steam on it,

15:00 which was handy.

What about your own messing area?

Oh, up the front of the ship around the fo'c'sle you had a scrubbed wooden table, about ten people in the mess and on the side of the ship on the K Class Destroyers, there was what they call a boot locker. A wooden locker with a lift up top and that's where you kept your clothes in there. There was always someone sitting on top.

15:30 Every day, two of the mess would be appointed as cooks for the mess and they'd get the food from the galley and then dish it out for the crew to eat. Destroyers had a special system, we were fed on one and nine pence a day and they've got a certain amount of basic foods for

16:00 the mess plus each mess had a mess caterer and he was allowed to get particular, [the] rest of the food, in the one and nine pence a day section. At the end of the month there'd be a great tallying up of the ships canteen who provided food for such and such a mess or if he got some ashore. And you might have a slight surplus, you know, maybe a few pence.

16:30 On the other hand if you had a slight deficit, well you got a new mess caterer. He got the abuse.

Was this an officer or just a normal rating?

On no. Normal rating. Just some bloke that you picked out of the… he'd be a good mess caterer, so he was the fellow.

Sounds like a job with a lot of responsibilities?

Yeah. Officers of course had an officer steward and they were differently

17:00 fed. The petty officers had a mess caterer too, but he was a different basis too. They had a mess steward, the petty officers. One of the sailors would be up there to help them. They had no cooks in the mess up there, the mess steward would look after that.

What sort of food are we talking about, what were your rations like?

Well they were alright I suppose. We use to get bread from time to time.

17:30 Now if there was a store ship, yes we'd get some bread. Now the bread would go green after a few days. But they reckon it was good for you, the green bits. You didn't worry about that.

Penicillin?

Yeah something like that, yeah.

What else did you have?

They use to make a bit of a duff out of flour and sultanas and each blokes recipe.

18:00 That would be a cook's job in the galley too, and a sort of a pudding. We'd get meat of some sort and that would be cooked in the galley. And potatoes of course. I had to peel potatoes at one stage. The cook of the mess did that or anybody else that liked helping him. They'd peel the potatoes for the mess and they'd be cooked up in the galley. The food was reasonable I suppose. But I remember once

18:30 we were in barracks in Portsmouth and the food we were given for an evening meal was a piece of cheese about that big and some Worcestershire sauce and that was it. Well somebody complained about this, these Australians are trying to make us…

What about meat, what meat, if any, did you

19:00 **get onboard?**

Oh, we had a refrigerator onboard Kashmir, which was… the early destroyers didn't have a fridge. So they had to get meat that would keep for a few days without refrigeration. Oh we got beef and mutton, just ordinary meat.

And how did the galleys' cooks serve it?

Oh they, the cook had a, the galley on the

19:30 Kashmir was oil-fired and they had a great, oh another thing in the destroyers, they had cocoa otherwise known as kai. And in each galley they'd be a great container of boiling water with chocolate in it and you'd come off watch on a stinking cold night, go down to the galley and get a cup of cocoa. It was very good.

20:00 Have some cocoa with some sugar possibly. Very good.

What else were you going to say about the oil-fired galley, what did they cook down there?

Oh just the ordinary food, the meat mostly, the meat, potatoes, vegetables if any.

What about the rum ration, how was that issued?

At eleven o'clock they pipe up spirits. And they had, they used to have this

20:30 great rum, the rum was from the West Indies, a special brew they had. It was originally colourless and they'd put, it would be coloured by, well by kennel it was coloured. And each rating got five ounces, that was one and three, one of rum and three of water, five ounces. And the cook of the mess went along and got the rum for the mess in a jar and

21:00 it was dished out to each persons cup in the mess at eleven o'clock. Except those who were on duty, cause they had to wait till later. I reckon rum was the best thing of all because in the Kashmir or any destroyer, the conditions for the crew were very cramped but nobody seemed to get colds that I knew of. I reckon the rum saved them.

21:30 It was a special brew they had.

Were there any other medicines or medicinal things you had access to?

They had a little sick bay in the Kashmir and we had a doctor onboard, which most destroyers had in those days. But the sick bay was a bit rough and ready.

Were you sick aboard the Kashmir?

Seasick? Oh yes.

22:00 Most people were. They got a rough ride.

How did you deal with that?

Oh you didn't. Over the side, over the leeward side. You didn't get any sympathy, none at all.

And was that something you got used to, how did you deal with that?

Yes, yes you'd get used to it after a while; you'd get used to it after a while. But

22:30 the first day you went to sea after you'd been at port, say overnight, you'd probably be seasick, at least I was. But after a while you get used to it.

Was there anybody that didn't get used to it? In your naval career, did you see chaps that just couldn't deal with seasickness?

I don't think so. I don't know of any particular case.

23:00 It wouldn't have worried the navy very much.

It must have been a bit of an issue about messing the ship up, if you were going to be sick all the time?

You'd be a bit unpopular because you couldn't do your duty properly. It was unpopular.

Well what were your duties? You've mentioned you action stations and cruising stations but what else did you have to do?

Well cleaning, everyday you had to scrub the deck,

23:30 the decks had to be scrubbed down. Now in the destroyer, the middle section of the deck is what they call the iron deck and it's a steel deck. The others fore and the aft, the steel deck is covered with stuff called 'semtec', I think it's called. It's sort of a mixture of cement and sawdust or something like that and that was spread about half an inch thick and that was fairly white and that had to be

24:00 washed down every morning.

Anything else apart from scrubbing deck? What else did you have to do?

Oh getting ammunition from the gun supplies, any cleaning, cleaning guns and that type of thing, general work around the ship. Boat work if required. I was in the sea boats crew in the Kashmir and we use to have to man one of our whalers to tie it to,

24:30 to secure the ship to the buoy. We'd have to, we'd lower the whaler, she'd be pulled up to the bow of the ship and passed down the pick up rope and hook it onto the buoy. That involved someone going up on the buoy and hooking on. Well if the ship misjudged a bit and bumped the buoy, that bloke finished up in the water. There was nowhere else to go.

Was that

25:00 **bloke you?**

No I did the job several times but I was lucky. But nowadays they, I see the navy has those in frogman suits who jump over the side and swim to the buoy and secure it.

What was the boats crew's job? What did you have to do?

Oh for a while she was a rowing boat, we had two whalers

25:30 and a motorboat in the Kashmir. We lost the motorboat. We had three whalers and a motorboat. But the whalers have a crew of five, three on one side and two on the other and one chap steering. Just a general sea boat, a double-ended boat, bit like a whaleboat, bit like a surfboat and a good sea boat. They could sail too, we had sails for them.

26:00 But generally they were rowed. The motorboat of course had an engine in it.

And what were they used for in your general navy…?

Well if the ship was, for example, moored to a buoy out in the harbour, to take people ashore you'd use the motorboat, that sort of thing. To secure to a buoy you'd use the whaler and a general purpose boat. If you required to get something out of the water you'd use the

26:30 whaler.

What about lifeboats, I mean this is something we'll talk about a bit more I'm sure?

Lifeboats?

But what sort of provision did they have for that?

Well virtually none. There were no lifeboats, the only boats we had were the whaler and the…. Some ships or most ships carried what they call Carley rafts. They were a raft made of a series of copper cylinders.

27:00 Rather than one copper cylinder, which [if it] got damaged you'd flood the lot, there was a series of copper cylinders and they were wrapped round, they were an oval shape, wrapped round with canvas and cork, with a wooden grate in the middle. And that was used for lifesaving, if required. And then during the war of course we had extra rafts and things put on them and it would float easily and it

27:30 would support people.

What sort or drill or training was there for abandoning ship or lifeboat drill?

There wasn't any.

Which is interesting. It must have been a dangerous job doing what the Kashmir was doing in the Atlantic?

It was in the end, yeah.

Yeah we'll come to that in time but

28:00 **can you tell us about what your routine was during the period in which the Kashmir was in the Atlantic. How long were you at sea for and what would happen?**

Oh we'd go to sea virtually every night. Go to sea from Plymouth or Portsmouth or Dartmouth. Patrol up and down the French coast, look for trouble, come back the next morning. On one occasion we had this very elementary radar

28:30 set and one night we were steaming up and down the French coast and picked up something on the radar or RDF as they called. It was fixed and you couldn't swing it and the ship had to swing and we picked up this thing twenty-five miles away which was a baby on the range set. It was a yacht full of frightened Frenchmen trying to escape; suddenly they've got six destroyers around them.

29:00 They were told, you know, where their position was and course to sail for Britain and away they went, let them go.

What was your responsibility towards civilians like that?

Oh, help them if we could.

And in that case you let them……?

Oh we helped them, we told them where they were, their position and where to go, where to aim for.

29:30 But it was a fairly calm day and the yacht was just a yacht, about thirty, forty foot long. I hope they got there.

They must have been very happy that you were British and not German?

That's right. That would have solved all their problems if we were German.

What were your watches, can you explain how the system, you were away at sea

30:00 **at night?**

Oh yes, your watches they were four hours on and four hours off. Now, in the morning early, dawn, you had dawn action station, which everybody closed up to their gun or whatever and also generally when the sun, at sunset, in case that's when you would strike a submarine or something like that. Otherwise you were four hours on or four hours off.

30:30 You went from eight in the morning til midday and then you came off watch and had your meal and the other watch came on from midday til four o'clock in the afternoon and then the "dog watches" came on after that, two hours on and two hours off, four til six and six til eight, and eight til midnight was the next one. Midnight to four o'clock was what they called the "graveyard watch."

31:00 **How did they signal change of watch? What was the procedure?**

Oh the boatswains pipe, the boatswain pipe in the destroyer. But in a bigger ship there'd be a bugler that would sound the bugle call for change of watch. But we used to use the boatswain's pipe.

What would the job be in a graveyard watch, what would your main responsibilities

31:30 **be then?**

I was on one of the guns, that's keeping watch for trouble. The officer of the watch, on the bridge, would be looking out or doing what the ship was supposed to be doing in the way of any special jobs that he had to do and looking out for trouble.

What trouble or near trouble, incidents of any kind, did you find occurred while you were patrolling in the Atlantic?

Gee,

32:00 well of course you had a watch or the officer of the watch at that rate because you've got destroyers generally at high speed, black as conditions. There's possibly a collision between these boats and they've got to watch that. And they've got to whatever course they're

32:30 supposed to be steering and make sure they're on that course. That's up to the helmsman in the wheelhouse. He's an AB [able seaman] in the destroyer and he's told what course to steer. But they gave you a very rough ride, very rough ride.

What do you mean by that, the rough ride?

Oh hitting the waves at high speed.

33:00 They used to sort of rise above the wave and drop. And it was just (UNCLEAR) down below.

What about in a beam sea?

Oh she'd roll, roll all the time in a beam sea.

And how would that affect you onboard?

Oh you'd get thrown all over the place. A rolling sea was difficult for the steersman to keep on the course

33:30 because you'd go with the waves if you weren't careful.

Your patrol was looking for German…

…destroyers yeah.

Destroyers, did you sight any during your time in the Atlantic?

Oh yeah.

And what happened?

They got away.

What would happen when you sighted a German destroyer?

Oh chase them, unfortunately the crowd we picked

34:00 up were a bit too far ahead of us. The Germans destroyers had a bit more speed than we did and they were not bad boats. They weren't good sea boats. They had a bit more speed than we did and a bit more gunnery than we did but we chased these blokes and they went into one of these French ports and (UNCLEAR).

Apart

34:30 **from encountering the German Navy, what other dangers were there at that time in the Atlantic?**

Oh mines, hitting mines. One of our destroyers Jersey, [HMS Jersey] she got sunk on a mine coming into Malta Harbour. She hit a mine and sank. They lost about thirty in the crew of Jersey when she hit the mine. Kelly had hit a mine previously

35:00 and she was repaired and went back into the flotilla again.

How did you know where the mines were or what was the…?

Oh you didn't. That's the trouble, you didn't. You knew roughly where mines had been laid in that area, so you were, you went along. We had lost a ship in the convoy through a mine too off Malta. But

35:30 the Germans laid several types of mines. One was the ordinary moored mine, which had it floated up and the others were acoustic mines which worked on the ships sound and they just drop on the ships, harbour bottom in shallow water. They were hard to find. And the others were magnetic mines, which they were also dropped in shallow water as a rule. But the ship had what they call a degaussing gear

36:00 which made it nonmagnetic which dropped them into de-mines or counteracted to be correct. But the acoustic ones were the hard ones.

Would you come across mines and have to delouse them or degauss them?

Well we didn't in our occasion. I don't remember us ever doing that ourselves but I'm in no doubt it was done.

What about when

36:30 **actually one of the submarines, did you encounter, what was the….?**

Submarines, well they had a what they called an ASDIC [Anti-Submarine Direction Indication Committee – crude sonar] set on the ship. ASDIC, that was a sound device, a dome that went down below the ship, which could be rotated and it sent out a sound signal and picked up the echo from it. Now there was an ASDIC rating who was sent, he was

37:00 trained to use this thing. He could pick up by the type of sound he got back and [when] he got it back whether it was a submarine or a whale or whatever. A few whales got done over. This thing used to make a pinging sound and the submarine could pick up the ping too, it use to upset them a bit this pinging noise, quite loudly. But we'd always use the ping, the ASDIC set at sea.

37:30 As soon as we left harbour it would be on, switched on.

What would happen when it encountered something?

A submarine? Oh a depth charge attack. If there was more than one destroyer they could work together and work from different angles on the submarine. We had a go at submarine off the south of Greece on an occasion. Six destroyers. He got really shaken up, I think.

38:00 He didn't claim he was killed but

What was your personal role during a depth charge attack? Obviously there was no anti-aircraft fire, what …?

Oh the guns crew would be closed up nevertheless. And 4.7 inch guns crew or the pom-pom closed up. Especially when the submarine might come up the surface and you could fire on him then with a gun. But

38:30 a few submarines who are damaged surfaced and they were fired on or…

That's a very good point there, how far could you track down to shoot at something on the water, was that a…?

Oh miles, a 4.7 inch gun….also on the forward guns would be below the ships railing which is why

39:00 and we use to take the railing down at sea and put it up when we came into harbour. Dreadful job, around the edge of the ship, getting this railing up in the rough weather, you don't fall over the side sort of thing. You were told if you fall over the side, that was it, they wouldn't stop for you.

Oh we'll continue this in a few minutes but we'll just stop and change the tape.

Tape 5

00:36 **Thanks for this Tom, just coming back to the depth charges.**

Yeah

How would you know if you hit a submarine or you didn't hit a submarine?

Oh well you'd guess a little bit. It was a bit hard to tell. Well the depth charges would be dropped in patterns. In our case four, in the Kashmir two over the stern, they were dropped from the bridge by

01:00 pulling a lever and each side of the ship had a depth charge thrower, which threw one out each side. They're about that long, they weighed three hundred pounds and they were exploded by water pressure. You'd set the depth on them, whatever depth you wanted them to explode at and the water pressure at that depth would fire them. Now during the war they had extra charges on these ships and they also put

01:30 extra weights on them to make them sink quicker. Also the bigger ones which had been old torpedo containers made into depth charges, much bigger. And then they later on brought out a thing called a Hedgehog, which fired depth charges from the front of the ship. It fired a pattern of these things in an oval shape pattern; I think it was ninety feet across. One of them should hit a submarine, they reckon. And then put

02:00 another gadget called a Squid which fired a depth charge much further ahead. They worked on water pressure as well as hitting a submarine. But I've never, I'd hate to serve in a submarine. You'd have to be mad. Most of them were.

So when you were sailing, did you ever, did your ship ever hit a submarine?

Yes, we attacked

02:30 one, probably an Italian off the south coast of Greece. This bloke was on the surface early in the morning and there were six destroyers with us. He got a hammering.

And in the Atlantic did you come across any at all?

No we didn't. We did a couple of exercises with the submarines, old types. They had some old submarines which were

03:00 no longer used as, for any active work and they put them for training with these ships for the ASDIC gear.

And so what did the exercises involve?

Just picking up the submarine and where she was and that sort of thing.

And did you go through the depth charge routine?

No, no, just to see, picking up the submarine. No, depth charges were, oh, expensive I suppose, of an expensive manner.

03:30 But we dropped a few and it must have been really nasty for the nerves of the submarine people to have a depth charge going off around them.

Were there any accidents with depth charges in the launching of them?

Well a couple yes. I found this later

04:00 a ship called the Punjabi [HMS Punjabi] a Tribal Class Destroyer (not in our crowd) was hit in the collision by a battleship, King George V hit it and chopped the depth charges off the stern and they exploded underneath it. Of course that was the end of Punjabi, he was a write-off after that one. And I think one of them got hit in Malta too. An air raid hit the ship and exploded the depth

04:30 charges. But in the case of the Punjabi, the depth charges should have been set to "safe", they shouldn't have had a depth on them at that stage. That was only put on as they fired them. The person in charge of, the fellow that put the depth, setting on the depth charge whatever depth they're suppose to go at.…

You also mentioned a bit about sailing up and down the French coast. Were you ever attacked by German night

05:00 **fighters during that time?**

Night fighters no. We were attacked by a Wellington bomber. I don't know whether it was a German flying into our pit I don't know, but this chap came into…They were suppose to not, the RAF [Royal Air Force] was told not to fly over lower than a certain height over ships to start off with, you know. This bloke was right down

05:30 and he came in about forty-five degrees on the port bow. And the officer in charge said, "Friendly aircraft." so we didn't fire at him. He went across the ship diagonally and as he went across, his rear gun roped the ship. It didn't hit anybody but gave us a fright. So the next time we were off the German coast and we were told then, you know don't muck about. If they come in distance,

06:00 fire at them. The next time we were off the French coast, a Blenheim came across to the side and he

fired, he let go his recognition signal which had changed. The flares would be dropped by these aircraft and they'd change day to day (the colour) and this bloke fired the wrong colours. So the fourth one said, "Permission for guns to fire?" to open up on him. Didn't hit him

06:30 but gave him a terrible fright. He was all over the place. A couple of days later someone was ashore in Plymouth and some air force bloke come in, "Are you blokes the ones off those one funnel battleship?" "Yeah". "You nearly killed us." It was our own force [air force] completely. They were too low and they fired the wrong recognition signals.

07:00 **So you were more attacked by your own planes than the Germans I take it?**

Yeah. But in the Mediterranean of course, we were attacked quite a bit by aircraft.

Just a bit more on the Atlantic, were you ever involved in sort of air sea rescue with downed pilots and picking fellows up?

No, we were involved

07:30 in the rescue of a motor torpedo boat off the French coast, I don't know how we got away with it in broad daylight. This bloke had broken down and we went across and picked him up and took him in tow and across to Britain. But it was broad daylight just off the French coast.

You picked him up in broad daylight?

Yeah and towed this motor boat, motor torpedo boat across

08:00 to off Plymouth or somewhere down there. We kept our guns crew closed up all the time of course but no disturbance.

Now the rumour is of sailors that they have a girl in every port, is that true?

That's a leading question. I did hear of some

08:30 bloke, one bloke that was in an N Class Destroyer. He joined the navy in Brisbane as a married man so he's down as 'married' and of course his wife got a allowance as a married man. And he went overseas to Britain and he got involved with Popsy [a girl] over there and he married her.

09:00 And she asked him about wives and he said, "Oh no, not in the Australian Navy. No way." So she believed that. Then he went, the ship went up to Glasgow and he got on with some Polish girl in Glasgow - that's three times. So she said, she knew war, she knew better than this, when he told

09:30 her. She found out he was married of course then that was in the fire. They're still trying to work it out I think, who he was married to and who should have got paid.

What did some of the fellows do, you know, during R and R [Rest and Recreation]? Did they have girls in particular ports or were there dances put on?

I'd think they'd be going somewhere.

10:00 Well it depends on whether, on these ships you weren't sort of based in one port (UNCLEAR) very often. But oh yes I guess boys are boys and girls are girls after all.

One of the important things the Archive is after is social settings of the time, not just the war. Can you share with me any sort of information that you might

10:30 **know of about the brothels and things like that?**

Brothel? Well not by any past experience. Malta was a great place for brothels. There was a street in Malta called I think it's called, known as The Gut and it's full of bars where you could buy and drink and these girls would come on and get you to buy

11:00 a sherry which is probably coloured water for them and of course the number of sherrys they got the sailor to buy, they got paid so much for it. And in Malta, there were various brothels in Malta. There had been but the British Government got some of them closed down. At Alexandria, Sister Street was the famous one in Alexandria. [UNCLEAR] that was the famous one there.

11:30 **And Portsmouth or Plymouth did they have…?**

Oh I suppose they did, I don't really know.

And just coming back again to this subject, did many of the fellows go to the brothels?

Yes they did I'm afraid. Any bloke who got VD [Venereal Disease] in the navy would only be

12:00 on a charge if he didn't report it. Thus report it and of course your leave would be stopped but any bloke that didn't report it and it was found out later, he'd be in real trouble.

What sort of things did they have, if a fellow got VD what sort of treatment was there?

Oh what they call Blue Light outfit which is a sort of an injection into the penis

12:30 of a blue ointment or cream. And also they got their treatment of VD at the time. Of course not what it is now, there was no penicillin or antibiotics in those days. One of the big problems in the Royal Navy was crabs and scabies. Scabies are treatable by using sulphur ointment. As a rule that would melt them.

13:00 Crabs are a lice that gets round the pubic area. It had to be treated by antiseptics and scrubbing and shaving and that sort of thing.

And can you contract crabs from anything from the toilet seat through sitting?

I believe so.

So if it got onboard a ship, could other fellows get it?

Oh yes, yeah that would be a possibility, yes. So that's why you report all,

13:30 it was reported for that reason. Oh it would be, certainly would be a possibility of spreading on the ship.

So what happened to a man if he didn't report?

Oh he'd be, first of all if he was found out, his leave would be stopped. They'd probably get some sort of punishment or jail or cell or something like that.

So onboard the Kashmir were there any fellows that did

14:00 **get into trouble in this particular area?**

Not that I know of no, no. We didn't have any that I know of. There may have been some but I didn't know of them.

The other area, and again I tread carefully, but the issue of homosexuality, was there anything like that?

Not on the Kashmir but on the Australia there was and a bloke got murdered but that was a long story though.

Can you share with me what happened there?

Yes,

14:30 In the stokers. There was three stokers, Riley, Elias and Gordon, and two of them were homosexuals, Elias and the other bloke. And Riley caught them in the act down in the engine room somewhere and they decided they'd chuck him over the side. So they got him on the upper deck one night when the ship was at sea and they tried to push him over the side and he

15:00 didn't want to be pushed over the side so he hung on and fought them and they stabbed him with their knives. Stabbed him about thirty times and then of course, that was heard by the guns crew and they came and there's these two blokes and they reckoned that they were trying to help Riley. They heard somebody attack him so they come to him. And of course he didn't,

15:30 he died the next day in the ship and he accused them. And there was a court-martial. It was held onboard HMNZS Leander, New Zealand ship and they got an officer to court martial, not off the Australia (they were all independent blokes). A man called Rapkey, who later on become a judge. He was an officer, a reserve officer.

16:00 He took what they called a prisoner's friend in the court-martial. He was given that job, someone to save these blokes. Any rate the only trouble, they were found guilty of murder and the only punishment in the navy was hanging so they were going to string these fellows up to the quarter arm there on the Australia and Rapkey thought it was a bit rough and he tried to get it commuted and eventually it went to the King. There was great argument whether the ship was under Australian

16:30 rules or British rules because all the Australian ships were covered by the British Navy during the war and any rate this went to the King. And he commuted the death sentence to life imprisonment and they did eight to twelve years at Long Bay [Gaol, Sydney]. Of course they were taken off the ship quick smart, for there own safety, these two blokes. But they were put at Long Bay and did their twelve years.

17:00 **So the issue for them was obviously the issue of homosexuality but also attempted murder?**

Oh yeah. Homosexuality was an offence in the navy, it's in the articles of war, 'No homosexuality'. It's spelled out there quite clearly but it's changed now I think, I'm not sure.

Just on the night when Riley was almost killed,

Yeah

17:30 **Where were you, were you on watch or….?**

I hadn't joined the ship, just before I joined the ship, this happened. He was nearly killed on the side of

the ship about a third of the way aft, on the bow. That's where the guns crew, near the guns crew. [They] had heard him, heard the fight going on. He was holding onto the guardrail and they tried to cut his hands off with their knives.

18:00 But

What was the feeling like onboard when you got there?

Oh very anti, oh the boys were not happy at this at all. The leading seaman in our mess, we were talking about this later, and he described how they were going to do it, how they were going to hang these blokes up from yard arm with a wire around his neck and a half inch shackle

18:30 there. They'd all have to be, lead a rope, everybody would have to grab on and pull at the same time. Any rate they didn't hang them, they didn't hang them.

And there's just the general feeling in the navy about the issue of homosexuality, what did the general fellow…?

Oh against it, against it and of course mind you this is fifty years ago.

19:00 It's a bit, I don't know if it's different now, I don't know really, I don't know. But that was definitely out.

And the navy in respect to prostitution, did it have any views on those sorts of things?

Prostitution? No it was OK. Well there's always been prostitution. But

19:30 there was no official view on it, except if you got VD, well you had to report it, that was all.

Were you fellows given lectures and stuff from doctors about… [VD]?

Oh, not much. But we got lined up in Portsmouth Barracks, a whole lot of people, and a doctor prattled on. He'd been on a ship that was based on Freetown

20:00 and apparently there's a lot of prostitution there amongst the natives and a lot of VD as a result. And he said, "They're just like rabbits." he said. "Just like rabbits."

Were you issued with anything for shore leave?

Well you could. In a barracks like Portsmouth, people going ashore

20:30 could go up and get condoms, oh yes. They also used, condoms are used in Carley Rafts and life saving equipment for keeping things [which] had to be kept dry in the rafts, were put in those things. Very good for that people, so I believed.

So condoms had a wide use, is what you're saying?

Yes.

21:00 **But as far as this doctor who was giving you a lecture in Portsmouth, did he take you through the ins and outs of it all?**

No not really, we already knew as much as he told us about getting VD. Oh dear.

In the army I understand there a thing called "the short arm parade" [inspection of genitalia]?

Oh yes.

The same thing in the navy?

No, oh I don't think

21:30 so unless it was suspected, but in the army certainly.

So you guys weren't inspected?

As a matter a fact at one stage in my career I was on in an army hospital in the Middle East and they gave all the patients one, but waste of time I reckon.

Nothing going on there?

22:00 **So how long where you and the HMS Kashmir serving just around England and the Atlantic?**

Oh gee, we went to the Mediterranean in, when was it, about April I think. We were [there] a few months, I couldn't remember the dates now. I remember we took a flotilla of, we escorted a flotilla of Fairmile launches out to Gibraltar

22:30 And as we left Plymouth there was an explosion on Plymouth Hole, a delayed action bomb had been dropped the week before, suddenly went off. And fortunately it was in the open ground, great clods of earth went up in the air. My last sight of England on that occasion.

So, just before we got to the Mediterranean, was Plymouth and Portsmouth bombed a lot when you

23:00 **were there?**

Oh yes they were bombed a lot. As matter a fact Plymouth, of course brick building don't take, they become, each bit becomes a missile and Plymouth was badly bombed and on one street corner the only building not hit was an insurance company. The other buildings were just flattened. This place was hardly even a glass window broken. But I

23:30 don't know what their process was, but it worked.

So during an air raid, when you were stationed at Plymouth or Portsmouth, did you have shelter to go into?

Oh we had an incident in, we came to sea one afternoon from Plymouth again, or Devonport and an air raid started so we didn't go to sea, we closed all our guns crew and we were told

24:00 if we sighted an aircraft, open fire on it. Any rate we were all closed up there, late in the afternoon and you could hear this German plane, I think he was a Heinkel. You could pick a Heinkel - it had a peculiar throbbing sound and there was a lot of low cloud about, a lot of low cloud. And they said, "Right, he's behind that cloud," so we opened up on it, on the cloud and the next minute

24:30 a bit of, something that looked like a parachute came down. "Oh we got the so and so!" and then the next of the barrage balloon came down, we brought down the barrage balloon. The captain had to go ashore and tell the barrage balloon people, you know, apologise to them. So we went to sea a bit late that day.

You were good shots though?

Oh gosh yes.

25:00 Had a shot at this cloud.

So your ship received orders to go to the Mediterranean, can you tell me about this first convoy that you took down?

We took, it wasn't actually a convoy, we took these Fairmile launches which are used for coastal escort and anti-submarine work that sort of thing. They used quite a few of them out here during the war too. But they were a launch built by a company called the

25:30 Fairmile Launch Company. It was a Canadian design, they were a hundred and four feet long I think, with two petrol engines in them and they were quite useful. Anyway we took these blokes out to the Med, flat calm. You could have rowed a dinghy all the way across the Bay of Biscay it was that flat. We took them out to Gibraltar and let them go there. Then we took another convoy to Malta. That was more exciting.

26:00 **So sorry, these first boats, what were they called again that you took out?**

Fairmiles.

Fairmiles? They were just motoring along next to you or did you actually carry them down on…?

No they were astern to us, we slowed down for them because the destroyers could do thirty [knots]. We were faster than the Fairmiles but it was a matter of also conserving fuel. It's a fair step to Gibraltar with these sort of boats.

26:30 We took them down there.

Again was this at night, or during the day?

No during the day and the night it took more than one 24 hours to get down there.

I take it you tried to avoid the night, oh sorry, the days as much as possible is that right?

Oh yes. As far as possible and we did a lot of our work, which is done at night time. A lot of our patrols were at night.

Excellent, so then after

27:00 **you dropped those the Fairmiles off you came back to England?**

No, I never came back to England.

Oh that was it, what happened then?

We took a convoy to Malta. We took a couple of cruisers, convoyed, escorted them to Malta. And then we were based on Malta. We only did a few bombardments in Malta, places like Benghazi and so forth.

27:30 And we came back to Malta. As we came back on one occasion the Jersey, one of our ships got sunk. We were a bit lucky because there were eight ships in the flotilla or six at that stage and we were the half leader, so we took charge, led the second half of four, five and six. And as we approached Malta harbour,

28:00 we got a signal that the Kashmir and the Kipling and a cruiser called the Gloucester which was with us, to go towards Sliema Creek which is further up the harbour, so we pulled out and Jersey became number four and coming through the entrance to the harbour he hit the mine. One of these acoustic mines underneath him, they lost about thirty odd of the crew. We would have been number four had we not

28:30 gone. Then we went from there to, steered round to (UNCLEAR) up to Gibraltar again and brought another convoy back.

Let's just go back again to the very first convoy that you went on. Can you tell me about that, the journey forward?

It was only two cruisers really; strangely enough one was called the Dido and I think they had some air force blokes or army blokes onboard, taking passage to Malta.

29:00 Any rate going past Patelleri, which is an Italian base, somebody must have stuck a match on the Dido and you could see it a mile away, he must have walked out to light a cigarette or something, whoever he was, he should have got a blast. They're amazing what this match showed at night time, cause everything was blacked out of course.

My understanding though in the Mediterranean

29:30 **is because of the phosphorous in the water that at night time the moonlight lights up your trail, is that right?**

I never saw phosphorous in the water myself. But Mediterranean was blue in those days; it's this dirty grey now. It's a bit polluted I'm told.

So did you realise how in the thick the Mediterranean was in respect to the war before you got there?

Well

30:00 yes. Well Malta was of course the main, if anybody got Malta, they got the Mediterranean. And so we were based on Malta, whether to go out and intercept Italian or German ships taking supplies from Italy to North Africa, for Rommel's army. And it was our job to chop those off.

Before we get to those

30:30 **particular attacks if you like. Can you tell me a bit about Malta and what it was like the layout, you've told me a little bit about the Street, called Strait, can you tell me about a bit more of Malta?**

Oh Malta's a strange island. There was originally no earth there, I believe, way back. It was all imported to grow fruit and vegetables and so forth.

31:00 There's a stone there I think it's called Tutra [Globigerina] I think, some sort of a calcium preparation, that when you, its quite easy to carve but once it's left open to the air it hardens up on the surface. So all these buildings are very old and they've been built out of this local stone and they've got hard on the surface and they're still there. But as you come into Malta there's a naval base called HMS St Elmo

31:30 on one side and on the other side there's a place called the Barracca which is a very high pedestrian and cars of course. And we use to go to sea from Malta in the afternoon very often and the Barracca would be lined with people, no secret operation, waving good-bye. It wasn't very secret. But

32:00 the place was bombed heavily, it was very badly bombed in Malta. And any ships, when the ships first came into Malta all the local boats called Diesos [Dghajsa], they're like a cross between a Venetian gondola and that sort of a shape of a boat. Would race out to the ship and the first one that got to the ship would empty the garbage tins. That was his job.

32:30 The garbage was taken ashore and they would dip, you know a penny a dip, get out half a fish or something like that. That's how things were in Malta. But and at night time we'd be bombed and we'd often spend the night ashore in the air raid shelters. We'd go ashore. And half the crew would go ashore and some would stay onboard

33:00 for the close range anti-aircraft guns, depending what duty you were on at the time. We were at one place in Malta alongside a dockyard there and when we came back in the morning the building on the dockyard had been hit. This Tutra [Globigerina] stone, it was all over the place. In fact the roof was on the ship. Bits of stone everywhere.

33:30 **So what would happen when a bomb actually hit the stone, I mean, I take it, shrapnel?**

Oh yes it would just explode the thing and go everywhere.

So because the stone was actually soft would the bomb actually …?

A bit inside it and then an explosion from inside the building inside the thick wall.

And with the bombing were many ships hit in the harbour?

34:00 Oh yes. There was a ship had got there on the previous convoy and she was right in the middle of the harbour. She went down. You could only see the top but they were still unloading it because they [wanted to] get whatever cargo they could get out of her. There was another ship there called the Essex and she'd been badly hit. She was ammunition, but she was saved. HMAS Perth saved her with fire hoses and so forth and

34:30 stopped the fire onboard. There was another destroyer there called the Gallant and the Gallant had hit a mine going to Malta and the bow of the ship was missing and she was there, and they use her guns as anti-aircraft, barraging the place. She was there for the rest of the war. They couldn't do much about her in Malta.

35:00 Another two from the dockyard, in the dock and they'd been hit by Stuka bombs. One ship had goodness knows how many holes in it, the other ship was telescoped, the ends were squashed and she was up in the middle. She was in the graving dock there at Malta.

And Allied air support to try and knock back the Germans, was there any?

Where?

Was there any Allied British

35:30 **Air Force there trying to fight off some of the Germans?**

Yes, there were about six Hurricanes. But what they use to do, the Germans, the Italians use to come over high level bombing and the first thing when they come, they take pictures first of all, then there'd be high level bombing. The Germans were more or less the Stuka type dive-bombing but the Hurricanes would take off when the Italians came and just fly around the airport because by the time they got up to these blokes it'd be too

36:00 late. So they used to get them off the ground and just get them up in the air and save them that way.

So they weren't particularly useful as far as defending Malta?

Not really. We, the next time we got aboard we had a few air force blokes on board taking passage and they put one bloke on the pom-pom guns crew

36:30 to observe aircraft and identify them. This bloke was worse than useless. He'd been, a job in Britain doing some particular job on the Spitfires. No wonder these Spitfires had been thrown in. And he told us about this job and we said, "You won't see any Spitfires here, mate." And he didn't either.

37:00 **So he wasn't particularly good at identifying planes?**

No. This bloke was no good at it at all. He, the plane we had on the British side at that time was the Fairey Swordfish. That was our Fleet Air arm plane attached to the [HMS] Ark Royal. An eight gun fighter, not a bad aircraft at all, pretty advanced. It was the most advanced

37:30 for aircraft carriers at that time. We thought they were Christmas and they were very good on convoys. But later on of course they improved the aircraft on aircraft carriers. They eventually flew Spitfires off them, modified Spitfires.

Why did you think this other plane was so good?

She was an eight gun fighter and there was four guns in each wing,

38:00 four machine guns. It was a fairly fast plane. The Fairey Aircraft Company had built a fighter-bomber originally and the Swordfish was built from that design, a modification of it. And they were quite a good aircraft. The other aircraft that we had on our the Fleet Arm was the Gloucester Gladiator which was a two wing job,

38:30 dated from the 1920's. They were real museum pieces.

Just coming back now to Malta, the people there you mentioned obviously they were finding it a bit hard. Can you share any stories about how they were coping?

Oh they were battling along. The Maltese people speak Maltese which is something similar to Italian

39:00 but they're not Italian, very anti-Italian in those days. The graffiti all over the place about 'Bomb Rome!, Bomb the Vatican!'. They were sort of battling, getting by as best they could.

So they were quite pro the British and the Allies?

Oh yeah, my word. They had been for quite a few years. In Napoleon's

39:30 time, they became part of the British Empire. They had quite a good dockyard there in Malta. Cause it's now independent, the dockyard's run by a commercial organisation.

Given supplies were obviously tight for the navy to get and probably air force and everyone else to get food and whatever in. How were the civilians coping with trying to get supplies for themselves?

40:00 As best they could. They, things weren't at all good for them, very bad. As I say they use to take our garbage in to shore and get what they could out of them.

We're now going to stop here Tom, end of the tape and then have lunch.

Tape 6

00:40 **Right, we were talking about Malta before lunch; I would like to know a bit more about what sort of experience you had on Malta? Did you get leave on the island or not…?**

We got an hour at a time, put it that way. We might get a

01:00 couple of hours leave. The first thing in the morning, if we were in port overnight which is not usual, they'd fly across the harbour and photograph the ships, the Italians generally. And following that they'd work out their scheme for the day. We often'd leave at night time and go out occasionally, or often go out on an essential operation at night time. Occasionally

01:30 we'd just stooge around the island at low speed so as not to make too much wash and they would spot us. And we'd come back in the morning that happened. And the crew or the on duty part would often sleep ashore. We'd be taken ashore and sleep in a cave or some sort of an air raid shelter. The place had been very tunnelled over the past year, I think railway tunnels originally,

02:00 and that we'd sleep there. And in each air raid shelter, there'd be some sort of a holy altar or whatever and some of those chappies, some of the locals, would be saying prayers or something of that nature. But we'd come back to the ship in the morning. As I say once she was hit, a building alongside was hit and she was covered in stone, bits of stone.

02:30 **There was a British submarine base at Malta**

Oh yes.

Did you see much of that?

We saw some of them, yes. There were subs based, I think it was the 10th Flotilla, was based on Malta. They did some good work too. We went out on a convoy expedition once to Durban. An Italian convoy, they sent a submarine up and the submarine hit the convoy before it got to Malta and unfortunately the convoy turned round and went home.

03:00 So we had a night doing nothing.

Did you do convoys to and from Malta?

We did just one convoy called Operation Tiger. We went to Gibraltar and when we go there we loaded from HMS Niad, a cruiser, a whole lot of batteries for submarines plus mine

03:30 sweeping gear. Now the minesweeping gear was magnetic mines. There was thick cable, oh about 'that' much diameter of rubber with a cord in the centre, that would pass around the ship and wound around the upper deck. It took the whole of the ship's company all night to do this. And we packed up about six o'clock in the morning, went to sea at seven o'clock and no sleep, picked up a convoy out in the

04:00 Atlantic and we took it through to Malta and then Greece. But we lost one ship in the process going through there. Also at Malta they equipped the ship with a secret weapon. It was a thing like a rocket. It was a normal rocket that fired up a hundred feet of wire it was wound round the tin and a bomb on the end of that. You know they use to put this, an aircraft

04:30 would hit this thing and crash into the bomb. Well it was fired by pulling a lanyard along the ships side. Well it came on the ship during the night, it was put on the after rail and nobody had any instruction on it, we just didn't have time to. We went to sea the next morning, picked up this convoy, two battleships, an aircraft carrier and numerous cruisers and destroyers and we set to get through the, back through the Straits of Gibraltar.

05:00 Any rate during the process of coming back, one of the ship's company seeing a bit of rope, shouldn't be there and he pulled it, and fired this rocket. It went up with a great black splash out behind it. Well then things started, the Ark Royal was with us and she turned into the air to fly her aircraft off and signals started flying, 'Have you seen aircraft?' 'Have you seen submarines?' 'Hey, what are you doing?'

05:30 And the kid's still holding a bit of string, "What happened?" Anyway we got out of that one alright.

Did you ever find out more about the details of this secret weapon, what it was actually, how it was suppose to work?

That was how it worked. You pull the string and the rocket went up in the air, oh maybe a couple a hundred feet and a great cloud of smoke behind it. And it pulled this great wire, oh a hundred feet of wire I suppose

06:00 with a thing they jammed in the end of it with a bomb. It's supposed to hit the aircraft or the aircraft would fly into it somehow and course the bomb would blow up the aircraft.

What about barrage balloons, you mentioned shooting down one in Portsmouth? Did you have barrage balloons attached to any ships in the convoy?

No. There was a barrage balloon in Plymouth, which is a great job for somebody. The Plymouth had a

06:30 ferry that went across to the Cornish side of the river, just backwards and forwards, a vehicle ferry. And it had a barrage balloon on it and a crew of air force blokes to look after it. They spent their entire day backwards and forwards on the ferry.

What about that convoy we were just talking about, how was the convoy organised? Obviously it was a very dangerous trip from Gibraltar to Malta?

Oh yes, yeah.

07:00 **How did the convoy organise itself?**

Well there was only five ships in this convoy. It was a convoy of fast ships, generally loaded with tanks, as a matter of fact they were, mostly going through to Greece. Some to Malta, some to Greece. Our stuff went to Malta, we loaded it on the destroyer, the mine sweeping gear and the batteries. Other destroyers carried gear too that had been brought out. On the way through past, what they call Skerki Bank off

07:30 Malta, we lost one ship the [HMS] Empire Song. She hit a mine and sank, pretty late at night, about midnight. But the other ships got through alright and went to Greece and we went into Malta and loaded our gear.

What happens onboard your ship when another ship in the convoy is lost?

Well we didn't (UNCLEAR) all about it; another destroyer went and picked up the crew.

08:00 One of the F Class destroyers picked up the crew. And they tried to save the ship but she was a dead loss. Well that's what happens.

How does that affect morale?

Oh OK. You're used to it. We weren't surprised. If we lost one ship in the Malta convoy, that was pretty good luck.

Well how does the fact that it's so easy to

08:30 **lose a ship, your chances of death are on a knife-edge, how does that affect the working conditions?**

Oh yes, a lot of the English blokes couldn't swim, amazingly. And we had a life jacket, like a tyre round your waist. You had to blow it up and inflate it. Now you had to wait til you got in the water to blow it up. Now if you were wounded in anyway, your chances of blowing it up are pretty nil.

09:00 And some of the English boys who couldn't swim reckon they wouldn't bother blowing it up. Quicker to drown, that was their attitude. I don't know why they couldn't swim. Well Australian Navy blokes had to pass a swimming test, all of them but the English didn't.

Were there any men overboard during your time?

I didn't see or know of any. You knew if you went overboard,

09:30 they wouldn't stop for you. And you were told that.

What happened when that convoy arrived at Malta, you were saying…?

Oh we unloaded the minesweeping gear and the rest of the convoy went on to… We met just outside Malta, the battle fleet from Alexandria, and they took the convoy onto Greece from there.

Around this

10:00 **time you were sent off to Greece yourself ? Or was there…, what happened before then?**

No we were based on Malta and chasing and watching for German convoys to Africa and we did a few bombardments etc.

Can you tell us about one of those, what did you bombard?

Benghazi was the place we bombarded. We went there with six destroyers at night and

10:30 our target was any ships in the harbour. If there were no ships in the harbour, aim at the Governor's Palace which is a building, conspicuous building and the Governor's Palace copped a few I think that night.

What would happen in the ship when you went out to do a bombardment? Can you take us through it step by step?

Well, the guns crews, we closed

11:00 up the 4.7 inch guns, the other guns are closed up just in case of low flying aircraft. Cause as soon as we stopped the bombardment, they set upon us Stuka aircraft, some were from Benghazi, attacked the ship and we put up a smoke screen and kept going. We went onto Tripoli and watching for convoys along the coast to attack. They nearly got the ship.

11:30 They got a very near miss on the ship, and didn't do any damage unfortunately. Ships get bumped about a bit.

How did that smoke screen work?

Well it works two ways. Ships burnt oil then the oil was put into the boilers heated and plenty of air. If you didn't put much air in it, the smoke came up, black smoke. So they cut off the air supply,

12:00 cut down the heating, previous heating and you get this cloud of black smoke out of the ships funnel. And also we had a chemical tank, or two chemical tanks on the after deck containing Chlorosulfonic Acid and they use to pump steam into these things and white smoke would come out, so you'd get black smoke from the funnel and white smoke from the ships wake. And it smelt terrible.

12:30 **Why did they have the white smoke method as well, was it just…**

Because the ships wake would show up white in the water, it would cover the disturbed water.

And what was it like on the ship once the smoke screen went up?

Oh not the best. The white smoke smelt strongly of the sulphurous type smoke and the other smoke was just smoke, it was damn near…

Obviously it protected you from…

Well they couldn't see us

13:00 **air raid. Were there any other dangers onboard while you were covered in smoke?**

No not really. There would have been a submarine danger had there been a submarine in the area. But it didn't affect us.

How long did it take to get the ship under smoke like that?

Oh not long. Only a few minutes, it was quite quick.

So what was the procedure, you set up outside Benghazi Harbour to begin with…?

13:30 Yeah. And we went from Benghazi to Tripoli.

Right.

And we were attacked by aircraft on the way, Stukas I think they were, dive-bombers. And then we put up a smoke screen and we just kept going. They dropped a few bombs on the ships, they got a near miss on the Kashmir but she kept going.

What can you see and hear in the ship when you're being attacked by a Stuka?

Well Stukas make a screaming

14:00 sound when they dive on you. It's not a, it just a screaming sound of the aircraft, it's not a special scream. They also had bombs when they fall, make a screaming sound too when they come down. Stukas used to come in later on in formations of five and they fly around the ship. Now you watch these blokes and the one that

14:30 dipped his wings would be the next Stuka to dive probably and he'd dive on you and dived down very low and go over the water away. Now having dropped his bomb you weren't worried about him, you didn't pay more attention to him, he was gone. But the next one would be on their way.

That siren on the Stuka, the noise it made was designed to sort of incite fear into the people below?

Oh yes

How would

15:00 **it work on your ship?**

It didn't actually, no special noise, it was just the noise of the aircraft coming through the air. It was rather terrifying, yeah. But there was no special screaming device. Some people thought there was but there was nothing.

What did you see of these planes yourself? Were you covered up in the gun the whole time?

Oh no I was on the pom-pom gun and we were quite open.

Can you describe what their attacks

15:30 **looked like? You mentioned the formation but what did it look like from the ship? What would you see?**

Well you concentrate on the aircraft. As he'd dive, he'd open fire. They dived down pretty low. It was quite a steep dive, I don't exactly know what angle they dived at but they dived at 360 miles an hour, the Stuka. It was a German aircraft

16:00 made by Junkers. They had a fixed undercarriage, crank wings and of course the bomb was underneath the aircraft. And as they finished the dive, they let the bomb go. But a high level bombing wasn't so difficult to dodge because you could watch the aircraft. And Italian aircraft used to come as formations of five as a rule but I think

16:30 only one bloke had the bomb aiming because one bloke would drop his bomb and they'd all drop. Now having seen the bomb over the aircraft, the ship would alter course so they were so hard to dodge. The Stuka of course was right on top of you and manoeuvrable; they'd jump around a bit.

What about hitting them with a pom-pom, how difficult was that?

It was not easy. We hoped we got a couple.

17:00 The pom-pom fired four barrels, ninety rounds per minute per barrel. A lot of shells up there. And every eighth shell was a tracer, in other words left a, you could watch the tracer going past. Every second shell in one barrel was a tracer.

And what would the tracer show you? How far off…?

17:30 **Just a red colour going up and you could alter your gun to suit it.**

When you say you got a couple, what were the instances where you shot them down, can you tell us about those?

Well one bloke for some reason…we were doing a convoy, a Malta convoy and this aircraft came from.. (we were on the port side of the convoy), he came through the starboard side across the convoy

18:00 and picked on us. It was a torpedo bomber. We hit him.

And what happened when you hit him?

He went in the water.

You saw the wreckage go down?

Yes. And another occasion we were attacked on the other side one night when we were, when the HMS Valiant was with us. She was a battleship with 4.5 inch anti-aircraft guns and unfortunately we

18:30 flew past the Valiant and she fired over us at the aircraft, a torpedo bomber, but one of the shells burst short, straight over us and our whaler which is a 27 foot boat, was peppered with shrapnel. Fortunately nobody got hit but the whaler was a mess. We got a new whaler.

Was there a competition amongst gun crews to shoot down aircraft or

19:00 **to be successful?**

Oh a certain amount of skiting about it. Some mate feeling his gun is better than the others etc. but that's normal, that's normal sort of talk.

What about celebrating a hit, would there be any kind of a attempt to…?

No, not really. Just watching the next bloke coming at you.

How much do you think about what you're doing at that moment when you're under attack and how much of it sort of happens automatically?

19:30 Oh you just concentrate on the attack at the time. You don't have much time to think about anything else and also you've got to be, you've actually got to be fairly quick. The captain of the gun etc or the gun trainer's got to be quick to alter his angle of attack on the aircraft.

What was your job in the incident we're talking about here? Were you on the safety

20:00 **catch there or...?**

Safety catch yeah. I done the right thing after one occasion.

And during a tense attack what would you be doing?

Well the safety catch, make sure they're working and also I was the communication. I had earphones on. Well that was difficult because the gun made a terrible clatter. And you're trying to listen to any instructions from the officer of the watch. And

20:30 also on the Kashmir we occasionally shot our own wireless aerials down because they went across the top of the gun and we brought them down a couple of times. We couldn't do much about that. They had to be rigged up again by one of the wireless people. They didn't like it.

What was coming through from the officer of the watch? What directions or what words would you be hearing in your earphones?

21:00 Oh mostly about opening fire and changing your target and the bearing of a target, that sort of thing. In fact the less said the better.

Would there be a procedure for talking over that communications system. Would you speak in plain language?

Oh plain language yeah, yeah. The trouble with the English blokes, they spoke the English dialect, which was difficult to understand at times, especially the North of England,

21:30 they were impossible.

And what would you do as the communications officer once you heard a direction through the earphones?

Well you'd do your best to tell the guns crew what had been said as far as you could.

What happened if you lost communication altogether?

Oh I don't know. We never actually lost communications except we actually shot the wireless aerials down. We were told them, but that didn't affect our communications really.

22:00 **What about the dangers of working on a gun, what are they? What, apart from being shot from above obviously with a bomb?**

That's it. You were out in the open. The pom-poms had no sort of shield around them. The 4.7 inch guns had a gun shield around them. It wasn't a complete turret, it was enclosed on three sides. The other danger with the pom-pom gun was if the gun had been firing and the safety catch had been put on to stop it,

22:30 one trigger might have gone halfway forward and that might fire the gun if you bump it. We had an occasion I think I mentioned about it, a lad nearly got killed, he was lucky. He got killed later but that was (UNCLEAR).

On the larger guns I know there were flash burns, was there any such thing on a pom-pom or you had explosions?

No, on the big guns later on, heaps later, they issued you with anti-flash

23:00 gear which was very unpopular. It was hot. It was gloves and sort of like a balaclava type of thing and it contained, so we were told, asbestos. Well that's frowned upon these days. We only wore them if we had to, especially in the tropics they were that hot.

What was your uniform in the Med, cause the one

23:30 **you described to me before obviously would have been a bit hot for the Mediterranean?**

Oh yes, of course in the destroyers at sea you just wore old gear, generally a boiler suit was the general. We used to use boiler suits as a rule, like a pair of overalls.

What was the near..., we were just talking before about your trip from Benghazi to Tripoli where you were attacked and there was a near miss. Can you explain in a bit more detail what

24:00 **happened there?**

Well we, the Stuka had followed us on the same, they get behind you and they come in the same direction as the ship and I was on the pom-pom gun and I got instructions to standby. Now that was a bit vague. So we stood by. Nobody could see nothing and this guy must have dived on the ship's wake

24:30 and dropped his bomb and she was up in the air, jumped up in the air. And the next thing I got on the, I heard it wasn't to me, was the skipper talking to the helmsman, "Is the ship still steering?" And she was

fortunately. It hadn't damaged the rudder. So we just carried on to, out of the range of the Stukas. They didn't come, didn't follow us too far.

What happened when you got to Tripoli, did you do

25:00 **shore bombardments again?**

No, actually Tripoli was a bit of a dead loss for us. We got there but there was no convoy which might have come in or ships coming in from Italy. We went back to Malta, picked Malta.

While you were at Malta was there any other submarines attacks or was that only the ones you've talked about already?

Oh the submarines

25:30 took off from Malta almost every night. There was a whole flotilla base there. And later on the next year they used submarines to bring supplies into Malta. The big mine-laying submarines used to bring in supplies of all sorts into Malta.

How were your own supplies at this time on the ship?

Oh well our food was, it wasn't bad really.

26:00 As I say the bread would last about a week before it went too green. And we had a refrigerator on the ship for meat, which it was to a degree. Oh the food was OK, roughly it was OK.

And how were you being resupplied yourselves? How would you getting food?

Oh Gibraltar.

In Gibraltar.

In Gibraltar and we'd get our supplies there because there's not much

26:30 you can buy in Malta. You might get ammunition in Malta but they had some supplies of ammunition there. We'd get those in Malta if we required them.

You mentioned there was very little shore leave in Malta, what about at the other end in Gibraltar. Were you able to go ashore?

Oh yes same again. Three or four hours at Gib [Gibraltar].

27:00 **What was there to do in Gibraltar? By all accounts it was a fairly interesting place during the war.**

Oh there was a couple of canteens and so forth there but nothing really special. There was a picture show there but it was a very poorly organised picture show. So that was OK there.

27:30 **After the Germans invaded Crete the Kashmir was moved from Malta, can you tell us…?**

Oh we went to Crete to…. the Germans were invading Crete then and we went to Crete then and that's when we got into trouble.

You mentioned before that you chased an Italian submarine on this trip, can you take us through that again?

Well this sub had

28:00 been up recharging his batteries I'd say during the night as they use to do and we spotted the sub on the surface south of Greece. We chased after him and then dropped depth charges. The two destroyers would get a line on a sub and one would get the other one to drop depth charges at a certain angle and we did that for quite a while and eventually we gave it away because we were due in Crete so not mucking about

28:30 with submarines.

This was around the middle of 1943?

Oh 41.

41. And what happened on that trip, can you tell us?

We went to Crete or off Crete and we joined up with a battle fleet there. They were under heavy air attack at the time. We would be two or three days without stopping. Some of our

29:00 ships, two of our ships the [HMS] Fiji, a cruiser and the [HMS] Gloucester were sunk. So we were sent off this night to go and look for survivors of these two ships. Well fortunately another destroyer got there first so they picked them up, as many as there were available. We then caught up with a couple of Greek ships, which the Germans had grabbed and they were taking troops and supplies to Malta.

29:30 they were actually what they call caiques, small sailing ships, coastal vessels. We sank them both. One was loaded with explosives I think, she went up with a bang. And then we bombarded an aerodrome, a place called Maleme, which was in Crete. The Germans had captured Maleme aerodrome. That was the start of their success in Crete. And the next morning as soon as it was

30:00 daylight, they started to attack us. They attacked by Stukas and they kept dive-bombing us until they got us. Now in Crete the Germans had eight hundred aircraft. We had none. They used their aircraft to bring in troops and to attack the ships. They sank the Gloucester and the Fiji,

30:30 they damaged the [HMS] Warspite. They sank the [HMS] Greyhound, a destroyer and another destroyer was sunk too, I can't remember the name of it. As soon as it was daylight they started on the Kelly and Kashmir and the Kipling. The Kipling was damaged Her rudders were knocked about and she was steering with propellers. They were hit on one and the stern on the other. And she stuck around for hours, fortunately.

31:00 She shouldn't have but she picked it up. She stuck around all day.

We'll just talk about the day that you were attacked in a bit more detail. Just before we get there, just a couple of questions about some of the things you just mentioned. You mentioned that you went out to pick up survivors from ships. Did the Kashmir ever have to pick survivors out of the water?

No the Kashmir didn't. No the Kipling picked us up but the Kashmir didn't.

What about the

31:30 **general morale and atmosphere at this stage I mean it was really kind of turning against the allies in Greece and Crete?**

Well the atmosphere was, the Germans were well in front. They'd conquered Yugoslavia, they'd overcome Greece, they'd conquered more or less Romania and these places. And the Egyptians used to be very pro- British

32:00 and they were pro-German the next week. They played the winners.

You could tell who was winning by who the Egyptians were supporting?

That's right.

What were you doing on that morning that you just mentioned, the morning you ended up getting attacked. Can you explain who you were with and what the situation was and the background?

We were with the Kelly and Kipling. The Kipling was

32:30 dropped out because of her engine problem but she didn't leave us She was just off in the distance and the Stukas came over at daylight just one after the other.

Where were you going and what was your…?

We were at that stage going back to rejoin the battle fleet which had gone on toward Alexandria. The Kelly got hit first of all I think.

33:00 And we were doing about thirty knots and she was turning at thirty knots and a destroyer at that speed leans over to the outside on the turn and she was hit by a stick of bombs and kept, rolled right over, she was upside down when I saw. And the crew, they lost about a hundred out of their crew. Some ran down the ship's side as she went on the keel. And they got us shortly after

33:30 that. Attacks by Stukas, one lot after the other. They hit us on the more or less on the pom-pom where I was, the bomb went through the pom-pom into the boiler and of course the boiler exploded, the bombs exploded and the ship broke in half. There was two halves and we were in the water in Carley Rafts or anything that would float. And the Kipling eventually picked us up

34:00 by which time she was in a bit of a mess. She'd had her oil tanks damaged by near misses. We left a trail of oil on the way back to Alexandria. She was attacked many times, many near misses on that trip. We didn't get back to Alexandria. We ran out of oil. They sent a tanker out to top her up. In the meantime I'd got rather badly wounded and I was on the upper deck, just lying on the upper deck

34:30 and I spent the next six or seven months in hospital.

Well I'd like to talk a lot more about this incident because obviously it was very traumatic and it changed your life and your war from that moment, but can you tell us about what it was like on the ship when the attack started, what did you do and where…?

Well actually all the anti-aircraft guns were firing. The 4.7 and pom-pom

35:00 and the Oerlikons, they were firing at the aircraft. They're close range weapons and they just kept firing. It was a pay day. There was no pay of course. It was a Thursday, we were paid every second

Thursday. The thought of pay was just out of the question. The thought of food was out of the question too.

How did the alarm go up, what was the first instance you knew you were in a bit of trouble?

35:30 Well we'd been up for two days basically by that time. We just kept going. First of all the attempts to pick up the Fiji and Gloucester, then the attempts to sink the other German ships and bombard the aerodrome. Night seemed to go onto day. It didn't [matter], you just kept going.

And then this morning there was a new

36:00 **attack? What was the first you…?**

Oh as soon as it was daylight, they started coming over from the aerodrome and dive-bombing the ships. They dive-bombed the Kipling, they dive-bombed the Kelly and sank the Kelly. Dive-bombed the Kashmir and sank it and we spent the next, rest of the day I don't know how many hours, it was quite a few hours in Carley Rafts in the oily water.

What

36:30 **sort of strength were they attacking in, how many Stukas were coming?**

Five at a time as a rule. Five at a time. One of the five would dive on you and they'd drop their bombs and go back for some more and the next five would come over. It was pretty intensive.

What did you see yourself from where you were on your gun of the Kelly getting hit?

Oh I saw the lot, I saw it get hit.

Can you describe that

37:00 **again for us?**

Yes she was doing I'd say thirty knots and she was turning and as I say a destroyer that turns at that speed, it leans over to the outside of the curve and she was leaning over and going into the corner and got hit by a bomb and the bomb exploded, damaged the ship and turned, she skipped, turning right over and the crew were, those of the crew that could do so

37:30 scrambled down the ship side as she went and were on the keel upside down. And going alongside her to pick up the survivors, the Kipling got more damage. She went alongside the Kelly to pick up the people from the keel and then she steamed around to pick us up. In the meantime the Germans were coming over dropping bombs trying to sink the Kipling, trying to machine gun the survivors and there it was.

How long after the Kelly got hit

38:00 **did the ……?**

Kashmir get hit? Oh only a few, matter of minutes. The next formation of aircraft that came over got us.

And what happened onboard the Kashmir at that moment?

Well we got hit, the pom-pom got hit. We were firing of course at these aircraft. Pom-pom was hit, the bomb went through the deck and into the boilers; the after boiler and that blew up too. There was steam everywhere.

38:30 **Were you thrown clear of this explosion? How did you survive?**

I was thrown up in the air. Coming down that I got the damage. Oh my spine was broken in four places and I spent the next few hours clinging onto a Carley Raft.

When did you sort of come to again after this?

Not very long. I knew I was in trouble

39:00 and taken to Alexandria. At that stage I had a beard and I'd been floating around in the oil and I had blood on my face and oil and I was taken to Alexandria and the chap who got us there, paramedics, he though I was an Indian, in fact he was sure I was an Indian.

I won't get too far ahead into the hospital just

39:30 **yet. We'll stop the tape.**

39:34 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:40 **All right you mentioned you were thrown into the air. You ended up breaking your spine.**

Yeah

What was the next thing that you remember? You were in the water? What…

In the water

01:00 yes, in the water. I remember the ship being broken in two and the after part of the ship was up in the air. She'd gone down like that and the propeller was sticking up there. And of course she sank later on. We got back to Alexandria in the Kipling.

What was the scene in the water? What had happened to the rest of the crew?

Oh we lost roughly a third of our crew,

01:30 eighty odd out of two hundred were lost. Some were drowned, some were killed by the explosion in the first place. Some were trapped down below in the ship, in the engine room. Some were knocked over into the water by machine gun bullets, when they machine-gunned the survivors.

You mentioned the water was full of oil, was it crowded with bodies, Carley rafts? What was around you at that time?

Well Carley rafts and odd bits of stuff that had

02:00 floated off the ship. Bits and pieces of broken, mostly woodwork of some sort that had floated away. And the Kipling came in amongst this crowd and got the Carley Rafts alongside, and they had a net over the side, helped us scramble up there with assistance.

How did you get up that net?

Well it's amazing what you can do when you've got to. I

02:30 got up the net as far as I could with my hands and the help from up top. The crew of the Kipling were sort of helping people as they came up the side and then put us on stretchers along the deck, gave up a shot of rum, which was very nice and a cigarette which was the first I'd ever smoked. That didn't impress me greatly however the rum did.

Who were you with in that

03:00 **Carley Raft?**

Oh gee. There would have been quite a few boys, I don't remember them. Except one bloke, his name was Idle, Ordinary Seaman Idle and he had, he'd been wounded and he was able pull his finger right back like that and he said, "Look at this". He survived.

What other wounds did people have?

Oh some

03:30 had just abrasions, broken bones that sort of thing. Of course most of the wounded didn't survive, because they couldn't swim.

What was done to try and pick people up after the Kipling had picked you up?

Oh she steered around she picked as many up that she could. Then she had to go back to Alexandria. But on the way back, she was damaged,

04:00 and left a trail of oil behind her. We ran out of oil before we got there. But

How much pain were you in?

Oh a fair bit of pain.

And who was there to help you, I mean you got a tot of rum and were you just left to your own devices after that?

That's right. There were quite a few survivors on the Kipling that were damaged in some way from ships, we

04:30 just laid out on the upper deck and every time she fired her guns we bounced up and down on the deck. Most unpleasant ride in one way, in some respects.

How close were you to losing hope at that point?

I don't know. Of course on the way back the Kipling was damaged that much that they tossed over the side a lot of weight, from the upper deck.

05:00 They dropped depth charges and so forth because when she keeled over on the turns she put a rail under the water, she was leaning over that much. We got to Alexandria, she was down by the bow and I

remember getting into…some of the battle fleet were already in Alexandria and they cheered ship as we came in. They cleared the upper deck. Everybody cheered the Kipling as we came

05:30 in. Then they reckoned I was an Indian.

You're an Indian?

I was taken to a 63rd General Hospital in Alexandria and I was there for a while. They had me wrapped up in plaster and then taken to a hospital at Cairo. And some Australian soldier upset the

06:00 staff at Cairo Hospital. They had tossed all the Australians out to a terrible place called El Maghara, up in the desert, oh shocking place. And from there went up to a convalescent home in Palestine between Tel Aviv and Haifa. A place called Kfar Vitkin. And from there I was sent back to 7th Hospital in Rehovot to get my plasters all removed and that's where I got malaria, at the hospital.

06:30 **Just coming back to that moment when you arrived back in. Was that a naval custom to cheer a ship in that came in?**

No only on special occasions. They reckon that Kipling had done a good job.

You would have to agree with them I imagine?

Oh yeah. They certainly were. We were lucky, they should quite easily have left us, otherwise the Kipling might have been sunk too. She was sunk a year or so later,

07:00 on another job. But oh we were lucky.

Who was the captain of the Kipling? Who was responsible for…?

His name was Sinclair Ford, Lieutenant Commander Sinclair Ford. Our flotilla was with Louis Mountbatten. He was in the Kelly of course and he was one of the survivors of Kelly. He was a mess too, he was covered in fuel oil

07:30 when I saw him last.

When you mentioned you were covered in fuel, oil, blood

Blood, water, the lot.

What did the people around you look like, did they all look like you?

Oh they were the same, all the same.

And how much did you know about what had happened, who had been picked up, what the survivor rate was, what news did you have of the tragedy?

I

08:00 didn't know till quite a while afterwards that we'd lost eighty-five. I didn't know that. Eventually I got, some years later from the British Admiralty, a list of the deceased.

Who were you concerned most about finding at that time?

Well there was eight Australians on board at the time. They were all OK. One chap was knocked about a bit, had

08:30 his back rather badly bruised but he, that was all. But the chaps I knew were all OK.

Where did you catch up with them? When did you find out that they were OK?

Oh in the hospital, the guns crew came to see me, the pom-pom guns crew came to see me, the captain came to see me and he offered me any

09:00 assistance, what I was like for money. Well I didn't have any, but I didn't need any at that stage, so his offer was OK. It was very kind of him, as I didn't require it. But my trouble was to be having lost all my kit cause they had to cut the clothes off me, they were covered in oil. I've still got my belt.

09:30 It was cut in two and I stitched it together later on. It won't fit me now. We had to fill in forms for lost kit. I filled in three of these wretched forms in various hospitals and the last I heard about it, and at that stage I was walking about up in Palestine in an army hospital and I was dressed in

10:00 an amazing amount of stuff. Some British Army uniform, some Australian Army uniform, something the Red Cross gave me, I was a mess. So I wrote I was sick of filling in forms, I wrote to the Commander Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet. I thought that will do something. He of course never saw it but I got action and I got most of my kit fixed up, repaired, replaced except for a hammock.

10:30 That caused me trouble later on. But and also my kit bag, the navy kit bags are canvas, very good quality stuff but I got a bit of calico bag, made by somebody in Egypt, not well made. And one cap instead of two.

How quickly did you realise or were you able

11:00 **to be told what your condition was and whether or not you'd be OK or what did the doctors do?**

Well first of all they came and first five days they did nothing because I was, you know they had a bit of a rush on their hands. We had blokes from Crete and Greece and Tobruk all being brought in there, you had to wait your turn. And I knew damn well

11:30 they'd fix up the easy ones first, I knew that. And I was five days before I was fixed up. And they used to come round every night and give us, well the patients that required it, a dose of morphine with an actual syringe and that was good. Used to float away because it was a pretty strong dose but I didn't realise

12:00 that as soon as they stopped it, you got what they call a withdrawal syndrome. So I went from Alexandria to Cairo in a hospital train, it was a train that had just shelves, people put into it like a coffin and shoved into a shelf. Well I nearly went crazy, I got this withdrawal syndrome and at that stage got dysentery and I was, you know, all out of shape,

12:30 completely hopeless. I got to Cairo and eventually it straightened out but I realised much later that that's what it was, withdrawal from morphine, what they call 'wild turkey'[cold turkey] in the junkies.

What were the symptoms of this withdrawal syndrome, was it just the pain or cravings?

Pain, cravings, shaking, claustrophobia,

13:00 it was just terrible.

It's amazing to hear I think, they didn't give you any information to what was happening to you?

No.

What did you know about what you were going through?

Oh no they, didn't worry about that, didn't worry about the sailors.

Was there any kind of bias against the sailors? You say that other people got treated first, was it just because their need was greater.

Oh

13:30 it was easier. They picked up the easy ones first. They were mostly sailors at that stage, mostly sailors. Because anybody who was badly wounded as a sailor generally didn't survive any rate, he drowned. Cause he couldn't look after himself in the water.

What information did you get about the fact that your spine had been broken. What did you know about what had happened and who had told you?

Oh I knew I was badly knocked about in the

14:00 spine but they told me later on you know your spine is broken. They put me in a plaster from hips right up to the shoulders, sort of a body plaster.

Just to give us an idea of the time line, you eventually got treated after about 5 days?

Yeah

You were given the morphine at this time?

Morphine yes.

Where did you go to then, how long?

We were sent up

14:30 to, I can't remember the actual number of days, we were sent up Cairo to a British Army Hospital. And it was up there somebody upset the staff and we were tossed out to this terrible place called El Maghara. I was at Cairo for a week or two. And I was in hospital, I'd got dysentery and I'd got this blessed plaster on and in the section of the hospital I was, there was four of us. A gunner's mate off

15:00 the [HMS] Orion, an Indian and we called Gandhi of course and an Australian Army bloke. He was a bit of a mess. He'd been shot through his shoulder and his leg and his leg was in plaster. His shoulder was in a sort of thing like a wing out there and he was in bed. So the doctors were came around this day, they spent a lot of time in hospital, British Army lining up the beds to make sure they're all

15:30 nice and straight and the patients had to either stand up if they could of sit up if they could or lie down straight. And there were no books or magazines were inside at all when the inspectors, the doctors' inspection came round. So this time they came round and the doctors said to me, "Oh we'll get you up

tomorrow", so I thought, "Oh that's good." So I could hardly wait till tomorrow.

16:00 So, in the morning as soon as I had breakfast I started to get up myself. I got out of bed and I fell straight down on the floor. And this chap, the army bloke, screamed out, "Sister, sister that man is dying to get out of bed." That was me, on the floor. I got put back into bed and of course they went crook on me about that. I didn't wait till I was told to get out of bed. They'd have helped me out etc.

16:30 **And how much could you move around with this cast on?**

Well my arms were OK, legs were O.K. you couldn't do any bending, bending or twisting, that sort of thing. As regard to picking up any weight, no, right out of the question. It still gives me trouble.

What did your daily life in hospital consist of then? What were you able to do?

Oh you got your three meals a day,

17:00 sometimes you might get a few books to read maybe floating around the hospital. Later on I was given physiotherapy, but that was much later, much later.

Initially you'd been given the morphine for the pain. What other treatments were you given to look after?

That was about it. That was about it plus the plaster cast. That was enough.

And after you'd gone cold turkey as

17:30 **you put it with the morphine, did you get more after that or…**

No I didn't actually know what had happened, as regards this withdrawal. I didn't know anything at all about it until I got an attack back a few years ago at St Vincent's [Hospital, Sydney]. That's another story. But I didn't know at that stage what it was.

What sort of care did you

18:00 **get from the nurses at these hospitals?**

Oh not too badly. The place at El Maghara, this plaster, I got a boil right there over the top of the plaster and it was quite a big boil, most unpleasant so I spoke to the nursing sister about this and she got a pair of scissors and went like 'that'. That was all the treatment she gave me for that one.

18:30 She didn't like Australians I don't think.

What were the hospitals like, how would you compare them? Because after El Maghara you were moved to an AGH [Australian General Hospital] is that right?

Went to, no, Kfar Vitkin, the convalescent home, then I went from there to 7th AGH.

So the Kfar Vitkin was an Australian convalescent home?

Oh yes, Australian convalescent home.

How did that differ from the British hospitals you'd been in?

Oh quite

19:00 good, it was better, it was better.

And what was better about it?

Oh just general attitude was one thing. The British were concerned about lining the beds up straight and that sort of thing and the patients are sitting up the right way. In the Australian [hospital], you sat up if you could but there wasn't great fuss about it. They use to come in the Cairo Hospital before the inspection,

19:30 two or three of these blokes and they'd lined the beds up, that one in and that one out, an inch at a time. It didn't matter about the patient.

That was the hospital that you were shoved out of for being Australians?

Yes, I think that's why we were tossed out. All the Australians were suddenly up to El Maghara.

What did you know about what had happened and why you'd been moved?

Oh I was never told.

20:00 **What about Kfar Vitkin, what was there, can you describe that to us?**

Yes it was a partly tented hospital. It was near a kibbutz, an Israeli type communal place just nearby. There was a beach at Kfar Vitkin too. It was halfway between Tel Aviv and Haifa and

20:30 I got pretty friendly with one of the ambulance drivers and I'm afraid I got a few more days absent without leave, at least twi. And went for a ride and came back late at night or late in the afternoon. This chap told me, the ambulance bloke, he'd discovered some Abbotts beer somewhere so we

21:00 went looking for Abbotts beer. We found it too.

What was your condition like at that stage when you were in the convalescent home?

Oh I was still in a plaster jacket at that stage. But I wasn't really good, wasn't really good.

What were your biggest

21:30 **problems apart from the inconvenience of the jacket?**

That was the most, the inconvenience of the, the fact that I had trouble lifting anything very much or twisting or bending that type of just general nuisance.

When you say you were absent without leave, how much were you able to get out at the home? What were the rules about….?

Oh the rules were you could possibly get out if you were given a leave

22:00 pass but it was not usual. But I went for a ride.

Did you find the Abbotts beer?

Yes.

What was it like?

In those days Abbotts beer was quite good. Now it's terrible, it's in tins.

I might just stop there for a second. [Interviewer changes] Tom can I

22:30 **just ask you a couple more questions about the sinking of the Kashmir? When you're actually, when the planes are dive-bombing, did you actually see the bomb coming down?**

Oh you'd see the plane there, they'd drop the bomb when they were quite close to you. And you'd see the plane come down on you and he'd drop his bomb and that was it. Fortunately he missed you most times.

The one that actually hit,

23:00 **did you know it was going to hit?**

Oh I guess that he was that close. We missed him with the pom-pom gun. We shouldn't have, never miss an aircraft. And we missed him with the pom-pom gun but he got us.

How long between him actually dropping the bomb and it coming down and the actual explosion.

Oh, pretty, only, oh it's hard to say. He was pretty close,

23:30 pretty close, Michael, pretty close. I remember next, the thing, the noise of it and also the fact that there was steam everywhere because he hit the boiler apparently. Went through the ship, went through the upper deck and hit the boiler and as I say the ship was in two pieces. She broke clean in half.

Since you broke a couple of bones in your back, did you land on something or

24:00 **was that?**

Oh I landed on the deck. The explosion blew me up in the air and oh blew a hole. I landed apparently on the steel deck and I don't remember actually landing. I remember going up in the air and getting a Carley Raft away and in the water. But it was pretty painful.

How many fellows in the

24:30 **pom-pom group survived?**

Oh seven. They mostly survived. No, six survived.

Now a while ago you mentioned about the life jackets, that you had to blow them up, but you had to blow them up when you're in the water?

Well if you blew it up they were a bit cumbersome if you were, it depends what the situation was at the time really. But you mostly blew

25:00 them up in the water.

So when did you blow yours up?

In the water somehow. In fact I don't know if I blew it up properly, probably not. I could swim and I could probably float without the life jacket on at the time. But any rate my clothes were saturated with oil, they just cut them off with

25:30 a pair of scissors. And my belt, they cut that off. I kept the belt, I'll stitch it together later on. But they just needed to burn the rest of them cause they'd gone past redemption.

When did you realise that you'd done serious injury to your back?

Oh I thought I had because there was that much pain. I didn't know exactly what the, I knew I'd done something bad. But

26:00 I was in that much pain with the thing.

And was it the fact that you jumped overboard or?

I didn't jump, the ship left us. They sort of launched the Carley Raft the same time that she'd gone. The Carley Raft more or less floated off and grabbed it in the water. The Carley Raft's got ropes around the side for people to hold onto and scramble aboard.

26:30 And we had, I don't know how many the raft was suppose to carry but we had more because she was slightly under the water. She was overloaded, overloaded.

Was that the only raft that got free from the boat?

Oh think some more got through. That was the only one I saw, was the one I was on. But I mean, to get up the side of the Kipling of course was a battle too. But

27:00 I climbed hand over hand up the net they had and help from the Kipling's crew on top dragging us over the side too.

Just coming back to the Kashmir, it's important for the Archive just to get sort of a reality of history and what happened. Did you actually see men go down with the ship?

Well not really. I don't remember. Well a lot of the men who went down with the ship were in the engine room, were down below on the ship.

27:30 They couldn't get out. And once she broke in half of course they were trapped down below. One chap got out of the aft magazine. I don't know how he got out but his brain had gone. He was on the Carley Raft but he was a mental case at that stage. I don't know whether he recovered or not, I don't know.

And the captain, King?

Captain

28:00 King was OK. He was OK. In fact, of the officers only one was killed. That was the doctor. He got out of the ship alright, he got on another Carley Raft, that's right. He got on a Carley Raft with some other crew and we were about five miles south of an island called Gavdos off Crete and the doctor and the people in the raft with him tried to paddle towards the island and they disappeared, so probably they got them in the water.

28:30 He was the only officer that was lost from the Kashmir.

The German planes that had obviously sunk you did they start strafing you and….?

Oh yes, yeah. One of my mates shot down one of these planes with an Oerlikon gun. He shot it down, after the ship had been hit. They give him a decoration for it. A chap called Ian Rhodes from Melbourne.

29:00 He got decorated for it.

What type of gun was it?

Oerlikon.

How does that…?

It's a Swiss gun, or Swedish, Swiss [the Oerlikon was Swiss]. It's a gun that fires a little shell, an explosive shell, a 20mm shell and it works on a recoil system. The shells are put in a belt under tension in a magazine that clips on

29:30 the side of the gun and the tension feeds the shells back into that breech of the gun and as it fires, it works on a recoil principle. It's aimed by the gun layer being, having a harness or a set of straps around his shoulders and walks around with the gun and aims it straight at the aircraft. They were quite a good little gun.

So he got one of the planes?

One of the planes, yeah.

30:00 **And he also survived?**

Oh yes he survived. He survived he went to HMS Sheffield as an officer and then on the Shropshire, HMAS Shropshire later on as an officer. He's now deceased unfortunately.

Given that you've entered into the water and it's all oily

Yes

Did that make it that much harder to swim, the oil?

Oh we didn't try to swim very hard, we were just hanging on. There was wood,

30:30 oh it's a sticky substance, it ruins your clothes.

At the beginning of the day you shared with Chris [interviewer], that 'anyone that's been to a war and says they weren't afraid never saw action' so to speak?

Yes that's right.

What were your emotions then? Were you afraid, did you think this was the end?

Yes we reckoned we wouldn't survive.

31:00 In fact we shouldn't have survived. The Kipling should never have stopped back the time she did to pick us up. They would have been quite justified in going with their own problems, going back to Alexandria. But as a matter a fact Kipling was lost in the end, the next year when three destroyers got

31:30 lost and she was picking up survivors and they torpedoed her. It just happens.

So when the Kipling with you onboard got into port was it at night at that point?

No it was daytime.

Still day.

Daytime. Oh ten o'clock in the morning I suppose. But she was down by the bow and leaving a trail of oil behind her. They tossed over the side a lot of weight off the upper

32:00 deck to stop her capsizing. Everything being ditched over the side of the ship.

Given that your father had died in World War One, did your mother receive news that you'd been injured?

That I'd been injured? Not quite. It was announced on the radio that the ships had been sunk and their names. But she eventually got a telegram

32:30 which was incorrect saying that I'd been put in hospital in East Africa. I've never been to East Africa in my life. But in the meantime I was able to write to her, sort of left-handed and on a telegram form and get that sent to her from the hospital. It was pretty brief that I was in hospital and that was it. Didn't give any details.

Your mum had been

33:00 **writing to you regularly up to that time?**

Up to that time. In fact mail is difficult, we didn't get much mail. But mother had been writing and then my stepfather had been writing to me.

Did she, after she heard the news of the sinking of the Kashmir, did she express any fears or anxieties?

Well she didn't know what had happened, they just said the ship has been sunk and they knew there was heavy loss of life at Crete because

33:30 apart from the Kashmir being sunk there were other ships sunk or damaged. And Crete was a bad show. We went there from Malta till eventually we were told we might have to evacuate the army from Crete. Well we didn't have to, they evacuated us from Crete. But I remember seeing a newspaper later

34:00 on, much later, it was dated the day after we got sunk, about how well the army was doing in Crete. We'd gone there to evacuate them, mostly. We got trapped in other things. So you know the propaganda is not very strictly accurate. Never, still isn't.

You mentioned about

34:30 **eighty men died on the Kashmir?**

Yeah.

Were they mainly, those eighty men, inside the actual ship?

Most of them would have been inside the ship. In the magazines or the engine room, that sort of position. Some were lost in the water. I think some were lost by, oh no a couple I know were lost in the water. We had some Newfoundlanders onboard, one chap was, he was a funny

35:00 fellow. I think he was halfway red Indian I think, but he had round his neck a whole lot of beads and bangles and one thing and another and (UNCLEAR) medals and they said to him one day if you ever fall over those things will drown you. I think they did too because he didn't survive. Poor bloke didn't survive.

And while you're in the boats and the planes are coming down strafing you, was anyone hit at

35:30 **that point of time or they missed?**

Oh just a couple I know but at that stage and I think they were hit by strafing I think so. Also they were trying to drop bombs on Kipling and of course the bombs in the water were exploding and making it quite unpleasant. Like being hit in the stomach each time with a blunt instrument, very hard.

36:00 **Really?**

Yeah.

Just in respect of this time, you mentioned when you were a child that you did go to church a few times, St Thomas's being one. Did you ever think at this point of time, "We may very well die here". Did you ever consider religion?

No, not really. I use to go to

36:30 church at Watsons Bay occasionally but really, I wasn't really a churchgoer. But no well you don't, I didn't anyway. My mother was very religious later on after my stepfather died. She got involved in a church at Chatswood and use to go up there of a Sunday, (UNCLEAR) Church at Chatswood. In the meantime we'd moved from Watsons Bay or she had, cause she sold

37:00 the big house down there and we bought here, in 1951 and she use to go to church at Chatswood. Some sort of Spiritualist Church I think, I'm not too sure.

Chris had taken us up to the point of the 7th AGH [Australian General Hospital] at…

Oh yes Rehovot, in the middle of Palestine, right in the middle. And I had my plaster cast

37:30 taken off there and a new one put on. Well now to take a plaster cast off these days, they've got a thing like an electric drill. It's easy. But this was taken off with a pair of garden shears, the thing was that thick. So I was put on two tables, feet on one table, head on another table and I was hacked about with the garden shears. When he was hacking away there, another doctor came in and said, "Why don't you give that man a local aesthetic?"

38:00 "No," he said "(UNCLEAR)" and he hacked away and wrapped me again in another jacket. I got malaria there in Rehovot. I had it for years. I use to get attacks, they weren't ever very serious attacks but nevertheless they were a damn nuisance. In April and September, six months attacks until 1955. And at that stage I

38:30 was talking to a chap from Park Davis's, I was working at Kings Cross and he had just brought out a tablet. They were a new thing, would I like to try it? So I gave it a go and it cured me. A thing called Camoquin, the most dreadful tasting thing I've ever tasted nevertheless it stopped the malaria.

Now given that you'd broken a few bones in your back, did you

39:00 **think you'd actually be able to walk and doctors were confident of that?**

Oh yes, but it's upset my legs right now. My hips have been replaced with steel hips for example, obviously later on, much later. But the trouble, the main trouble is reaching up on high shelves or lifting things, or twisting or turning that was

39:30 the bit I couldn't do. But I went to sea again in the [HMAS] Australia for some years afterwards and I was put on the Australia as a gun loader on the 4 inch anti-aircraft gun and I couldn't juggle the shells up (they weigh 51 pounds) to put in the gun barrel. So I had to go to the sick bay and tell them that I was useless

40:00 and so I was given a job where you didn't have to do that sort of work, lifting. When I came to get a commission later on I was not put to sea anymore, put ashore. I was told, "You're not fit for sea service " And I said, "I've already been a naval seaman for some years." And, "That's different," they said. "An officer's life is much harder." Well that was news to me.

40:30 **We'll just pause there**

Tape 8

01:07 **So Tom just back with the 7th AGH Hospital. Can you tell us something just about the nurses and the doctors there, what they were like?**

Yes the 7th AGH was more or less a tented hospital, in other words most of the wards were tents. Cause

01:30 it could be moved, could be moved from here to there. And for that reason it was tented. The nurses were quite good. We had a couple of Italian prisoners of war doing odd jobs around the place. They were scared stiff they might be sent back to their organization. So they did as they were told. From the 7th AGH I went back to Kfar Vitkin and then eventually to a place called Beit Jirja

02:00 which is a convalescent place and from there I went to Alexandria after some time. That was about January '42. And Alexandria, HMS Sphinx they called her and from there to Tewfik, Port Tewfik and back in the [SS] Mauritania and [SS] Stirling Castle to Australia. We left Alexandria…

Before we go on sorry,

02:30 **just a few more questions about Palestine.**

Yeah

Just in respect to the hospitals. The nurses there, what were their major roles in respect to your treatment?

Well my treatment, not a great deal really because they couldn't do much for me except with this plaster cast and I was x-rayed two or three times to see what the bones were like and I was eventually sent to this place

03:00 at Beit Jirja. I was also sent down in the meantime to the 1st AGH at Gaza and the plaster cast was completely removed there. And I was given a bit of physiotherapy.

What sort of physiotherapy, what did that involve?

Well mostly bending exercises, bending and leg exercises and up and down arms

03:30 and that sort of thing, just general muscular movement of the legs and arms.

Did at any stage, did you think you actually would return to the navy or you'd be discharged?

Oh I think I would have returned. Actually I probably could have, at that stage, got out of the navy. But I was sent back to the navy. I went to this place in Alexandria

04:00 and they had to give me a job to do. So I was given a job in the sick bay helping with the paperwork. I was doing, shuffling these papers and I came back to a lunch in the tent and my kit was gone, the lot, there wasn't a thing left. So apparently the petty officer in charge, they were going to send back to Australia and other places a

04:30 draft of people from some (UNCLEAR). I didn't answer their roll call of course. I was working in the sickbay and they reckon I was a deserter so they came and grabbed my kit. I come back and no kit. And so I went down and complained about this and they said, "Oh we had you down as a deserter, we couldn't find you."

05:00 And I said to this bloke, "Now look you've given me a job in the sick bay. That's where I was, and you couldn't find me." I said, "You didn't look very hard." That didn't get many brownie points either. I was then put on a troop train that afternoon. A troop train came into the railway station there and at that time, Egyptian trains, the first class

05:30 carriages, were quite elaborate. They were 'Officers only', of course. Second class were ratings or men, third class were what they called native carriages. They weren't used except in an emergency. They were like the old fashion steam suburban trains in Sydney except the windows had no glass in them, just the framework and the toilet at the end of the carriage wasn't there, just a hole. And they were wooden seats

06:00 each side. And in the middle was what they call a toilet. Well I won't describe that, it was quite a mess. So we were

A mess because no one had cleaned it?

Oh there's no cleaning in Southern Egypt. No. Any rate the train came in to pick us, this draft of ratings up and there weren't enough carriages so they got some more carriages after much

06:30 argument with the Gypos [slang for Egyptians] and they were these native carriages. Well we spent the night, a cold night in the desert, it gets cold there of a night time in one of these things. And somebody said, "Why don't we have a fire to keep us warm?" so that was no sooner said than done. And all the boys used to have knives in those days and we started whittling up the seats and they built a bonfire because the thing had

07:00 a concrete floor. Fortunately that didn't burn, but a whole row of seats were missing, gone up in flames. Everyone sat around warming themselves with the fire. We got down to just outside Port Tewfik to an Italian prisoner of war camp. We stopped there, early, very early morning, we all piled out on the desert, no platform. And the Italian

07:30 prisoners were doubled on the other side of the wire screaming abuse at us. Some sailor picked up a stone and threw it in that general direction. You've never seen people move so quick as the Italian prisoners, gone. And we were there a couple of days and the first day we were there the guards were New Zealanders and each sort of section had a tower with a bloke up the top watching them. And the second day

08:00 we were there they took the Kiwis off and put Ghurkhas there. Well that scared the Italians. They'd heard about these Ghurkhas who'd cut your throat for two bob. They got up in these compartments as far away from the bloke in the tower and watched him. They were scared stiff. After a couple of days we were taken down and put onboard the Mauritania and from there to Bombay.

08:30 **Just before we go on that particular journey, you'd spoken earlier when you were in Alexandria that they thought that you'd deserted because they didn't realise you were on your shift. Was desertion a problem?**

Well there were deserters certainly. Another problem was ships there, blokes there, it was called Absent Without Leave. They went ashore and got drunk

09:00 somewhere and didn't come back till a day later sort of thing. That was quite a problem on the ships. But there were deserters; well there were deserters certainly. But it was a very great problem.

Do you have any stories about fellows deserting or going Absent Without Leave?

Yes, a couple of blokes I knew. This fellow was on the Australia with me later on and he came from

09:30 South Australia and his wife lived in South Australia. And the ship never went to South Australia. We often went to Sydney or Brisbane during the war. And she wanted to move to Sydney to stay with some relatives. Well when it came to the point, there was restrictions on travel in those days, on the interstate trains and you had to get permission from the ship's captain for her to

10:00 be moved, her house of residence. And the ship's captain knocked him back, so he deserted. He went. He's still missing, as far as I know. Another who was on the Australia deserted, his wife was ill and he wanted leave to go and see her and also to draw money out of his bank account, which was refused.

10:30 So he deserted.

And what was the penalty for deserting or being Absent Without Leave?

Oh well, cells. You would be put in the cells at Garden Island, ninety day cells at Garden Island or Long Bay later, depending on how bad it was, how bad you were. But the cells at Garden Island was a building at the end of the island. It's now been demolished because the island's

11:00 been extended to the mainland and it was a dreadful place, dreadful place. It was known as 'The Corner'. It was on the corner of the island. Concrete walls then. The prisoners weren't allowed to speak, all this sort of thing. They were allowed two books they could read, one was the bible and the other was the seamanship manual, nothing else.

11:30 And they use to give them lousy jobs. They had a pile of coal in the yard corner and they'd (UNCLEAR) he had to shovel the coal across to that corner and then shovel it back.

Going back to Alexandria, given that it was sort of like a military town, there were fellows from the army there, navy there. Was there much conflict between the army and the navy?

No, the navy and the air force.

12:00 **What happened there?**

Well they didn't get on. Especially after Crete. Oh and the army and the air force too. However that's another story.

Can you tell us that story?

Well see there was virtually no air force at Crete and the Germans, they were in great strength. And the navy blokes reckon that was not the right

12:30 thing to do and there were fights and that in the street with them. But they eventually reconciled their differences now I think.

So there were fights because there was no air support?

That's right. Same with Greece, there was no air support in Greece either. But the air force reckon that

the Greek airfields, they couldn't fly aircraft

13:00 off them. But as soon as the Germans conquered Greece, they could fly aircraft off them, at least the Germans could.

So were you involved at all in these differences of opinion with the air force?

No I kept right out of it, kept right out of it. My next door neighbour on that side, is an ex-air force bloke. He use to fly Spitfires, very good friend of mine and I know a lot of blokes in the air force

13:30 and I don't get involved in arguments any more with them at all.

What about the British red caps and the MPs [Military Police] what were they like in Egypt?

Oh a pain in the neck. The Provosts, they weren't very popular, weren't really popular at all. Yes.

Can you tell me a few stories about them?

Except one,

14:00 I was in Kfar Vitkin and this chap was brought in as a patient, he was a Red Cap Provost and he died during the night and they said, "Oh well, he was only a provost." Not much sympathy for him.

So was it that everyone hated the provosts?

Well they were like standover

14:30 merchants. They were like the policemen ashore with a bit more authority, a bit more push. So the policemen aren't the most popular people around the place and the provosts were worse than them they reckon.

So did you and your mates at all get in trouble from the provosts?

No I didn't. I kept clear of all these people.

15:00 The only trouble I got in was in Brisbane with a friend of mine. We went ashore in Brisbane and there had been a great fight between some American Negroes and some other people and the American Army Provosts, they use to wear those white caps, they were involved with this. And instead of, they started taking part in it,

15:30 and the Australians, some Australian soldiers, so the two of us marched up (I think it was Bulimba Pier) and we said "Righto you go here, you go that way and you got that way." We spread these and the whole argument ceased. I don't know why. But they were going to have ulcers, put people under arrest and goodness knows what.

16:00 Get rid of them out of the way and the battle stopped.

Finally in respect to Palestine and Egypt, my understanding is the Arabs use to steal a lot of stuff?

Oh yes indeed. I was at a place called Beit Jirja which was a convalescent sort of army [hospital] and we were all in Indian army tents, quite big tents and whole rows

16:30 of them and they had a sentry marching up and down. The tents weren't all occupied at this stage and two tents disappeared. They were quite big things, with tent poles and they just disappeared. A friend of mine, an army bloke, he was a bit bomb happy, he was a mental case. They called the Palestine police in

17:00 and they were taking particulars about who knew what about these tents. And this chap told them some great story about how he saw the Arabs coming over the hill on camels and the fellows writing it all down. And some said, "Forget about all that, he's nuts." Anyway they caught an old boy later on, he was on a donkey and he was lugging a string of camels behind him with

17:30 tents on top and he knew nothing at all about it, nothing at all. He was just driving his camel. So they grabbed the tents any rate. They didn't believe him.

Earlier we'd also spoken about the brothels, how did the Arab men regard the brothels, given that some of the women were working there?

I don't know really.

18:00 Arab men can have four wives under their religion. And if you employ an Arab to do a job, he'd probably send one of his wives along to do it. They were organised. But in regards to their sex life I don't really know.

But there were no tensions between the Arabs and you guys in the navy or the British?

Not as far as I know, no. They got on

18:30 fairly well with the Arabs, except the Arabs use to back the winning side every chance that they got. But

they were great thieves.

Did you or your mates ever get them back and thieve off them?

No. I remember a bloke in the tent I was with. This bloke was an alcoholic soldier and he sold his uniform. There was a terrible

19:00 wine called, I forget the name of the stuff, doesn't matter, terrible plonk [wine] that the Arabs use to make and this bloke was an alcoholic and his uniform had gone on it and eventually he got a bottle of this stuff from an Arab and he started to drink it and the Arab had peed in the bottle. And the Arab ran

19:30 and this bloke chucked the bottle at him, mind you he was an alcoholic and it hit him fair in the skull and he was running, if he'd had been sober he couldn't have hit him. The bottle hit the Arab and it bounced and the Arab just kept on going.

So how did he find out the Arab had peed in the bottle?

Oh he did. The taste is a bit different. Alicante was the name of the wine.

20:00 Alicante wine, of course, dreadful firewater.

He'd be the laughing stock wouldn't he of the….?

Oh yes.

So you got onboard the SS Mauritania, is that right?

Mauritania

and you went…?

To Bombay.

What was it like onboard? Because that was the first time you got back onboard a ship since the sinking?

20:30 Oh she was a troop ship. And one of our naval blokes, a fellow called Westleit [?], he was bomb happy [unstable], he was a nut. And one of the air force blokes onboard, they travelled first class and he married a Greek girl, rather a pretty drop too. So silly Westleit who's a nut went up near the (UNCLEAR) said he was reporter from the Women's Weekly and she's telling him some great story and he wrote all this

21:00 rubbish down and he came back to Sydney. He got put out of the navy because he's a mental case. And he tried to publish this thing about the girl, the Greek girl in Women's Weekly. But we had a lifeboat drill on the Mauritania. I was in a lifeboat, or we had lifeboat drill first of all. And the lifeboat I was in I wasn't real happy

21:30 about it because there were a couple of nursing sisters. They're alright but one bloke was I think, a cook and another bloke was another nut-head. I think I was still reasonably sane at that stage and I knew a bit about boats. I did the basic going out in the lifeboat with these people, however we didn't need to, we got to Bombay alright. And we were ashore there for a while.

22:00 And we joined the ship called the Stirling Castle

Just while you're on the Mauritania, were you still being taken care of by hospital staff?

Oh no, no, I was back on my own at that stage. I'd had a uniform of sorts and I was just one of the troops.

And you were just in transport from…?

Transport to Australia. She went to Bombay and then she went from there to Durban

22:30 and back to the UK.

Can you just share with me any reflections of Bombay, what that was like as a city?

Filthy. Bombay is, or was in those days, full of street sellers of one type or another. People being shaved on the edge of the footpath with a razor blade held, it was like this. And they

23:00 also had a habit, the Indians, of chewing betel nut, which is a nut, it's stuff called 'Areca nut' actually. And this would be ground up by the seller, a mix up of a leaf like a hydrangea leaf and mixed up with lime in it and rolled. And the Indians would chew it. Now that produced great bits of

23:30 red saliva and they'd spit all over the street, on buildings and everywhere this great bits of red spittle every place. Also there was a fish market. I went to the fish market one day poking around and the people selling fish, mostly women, sitting on benches with a heap of fish beside them. And this chap started arguing with an Indian seller, he was an Indian, about the price of fish or whatever, so she picked up a long fish like that and hit him on the head.

24:00 Well they reckon the customer's always right but this bloke he got hit with a fish. We joined the Stirling Castle then.

Can I just ask a couple more questions about Bombay? Were the Arabs and the Indians the same type of people, the same type of property, the same type of people?

No. No. And also in Bombay,

24:30 the property is dreadful. People sleep in the street. Even our, we were in a pub, a hotel there and the staff (UNCLEAR) sleeping in the street. I saw people sleeping in the railway station up and down the stairs. They must have been corrugated in the morning. And also people begging all the time for a few coins. There was one old bloke outside the

25:00 place where we were staying, he'd say (UNCLEAR) but he might have got maybe a shilling a week or something like that. But, oh, dreadful.

Was Bombay still run by the British?

It was then. It was run by the British until 1940 odd. But a lot of the people I saw being pushed about were being pushed about by Indians not so much British.

25:30 They were standover merchants. But I saw a building being built in Bombay. It was about three storeys high and they built a framework of bamboo, up like stairs and up this framework there was a whole lot of Indian girls, women and they were passing packets of concrete up the top now, chain. We'd have had a crane up the top and lift this stuff up

26:00 very quickly, but no…still I suppose it gave employment to these people. Still I don't know how many there was on this day but there were quite a number just passing buckets of concrete up.

You used the phrase nigs is that British people, Nig's [There is some confusion here on the interviewer's part]?

Nips.

Nips.

No, Japanese.

Oh Japanese.

Yeah Nipponese.

So the people who were using standover tactics

26:30 **in Bombay were the Nips or..?**

No, Indians.

Indians.

Indians.

So they were just Indians, police and…?

Indian police and Indians, just Indians. Employers who pushed them around.

And what was the food like there?

Oh mostly curries. The food was good. The food was good and also in Bombay, white men didn't do much at all, Indians did all the work.

27:00 So one of our chaps said, "Where will he wash his uniform?" "Oh, the hotel, no?" He gave his uniforms to some bloke to be washed and he saw him, there's a fountain in the street, it's full of fountains, Bombay and here's the bloke bashing his clothes up and down in the fountain. They came up pretty clean too.

27:30 Also the cow of course in India is a sacred animal and on a certain day I was there, I don't know whether it was a particular day. They were leading cows around, mostly women, they were leading a cow around with a basket of rushes and they'd pay, some of them, and feed the cow a few rushes. Apparently that was holy. And one cow had five legs, he was a really holy cow, she was doing a very good trade, five legged

28:00 cow.

So from Bombay in India you then caught the SS Stirling Castle?

Stirling Castle, now she used to run from Britain to South Africa before the war, a beautiful ship.

Was she, how was she different to the Mauritania?

Oh she was a bit smaller, she was a diesel ship, the Mauritania was turbine, she was diesel and

28:30 we went from Bombay to Colombo. We went from Colombo to Melbourne.

Were you heading for Singapore?

No.

No?

No, no we weren't. Singapore had fallen by this stage. When I was in Bombay, Singapore fell.

So when you're in Bombay you first heard that the Japanese had entered into the war?

Oh no I knew it before then, they entered into the war in

29:00 December, December the 7th and Singapore fell in February. So they were in the war before then.

So where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor and …?

Pearl Harbor? I was in Palestine when I heard about Pearl Harbor. In Bombay I got talking to a Yank, he was off an American ship, a troop ship called the [USS] Mount Vernon and she'd been in Singapore when the Japs attacked Singapore and

29:30 they'd bombed the ship, they'd bombed everything. And one of the bombs went through a sick bay on the ship, killed of course a patient, didn't do that much good. But this chap was really upset about this and he goes the Japs as far as he was concerned had fired on the Red Cross. This captain was going to report to President Roosevelt as a matter a fact and complain. He was quite serious about this.

30:00 **So did you foresee that Japan would enter the war, did you see that coming?**

Oh there was lots of people thought they would, they thought they might but we didn't have any real knowledge or accurate knowledge of them coming into the war. The politicians no doubt had more of an inkling than we did.

What were your views of the Japanese were they a?

30:30 Japanese, while dreadful people morally, they had the best torpedos in the world, they had the best fighter aircraft on aircraft carriers in the world, they were. See the Japanese Navy had been affected by the Washington Naval Treaty on the size of guns. But the Washington Naval Treaty which was signed in 1922 between other countries

31:00 didn't specify anything about torpedos so the Japs invented special torpedos which were bigger, greater diameter, longer, in other words long range torpedos and they were faster and accurate. And the Japs spent all their time between about 1922 and 1939 practising with these things up round the north of the Pacific. They lost a few of their troops doing

31:30 it through accidents and one thing and another but they had the best torpedo in the world at that stage. And their aircraft, the Zero, was a very good fighter aircraft off aircraft carriers. Much better than ours.

Did you know anything of the Japanese torpedo or the Zero before they entered the war?

No, no, I heard about the torpedos later

32:00 and I saw a few results of their hits. But they certainly were the best.

So on the way home on the Stirling Castle, just share with me a few things that happened onboard?

Oh nothing special, we just went from Colombo to Melbourne. We went fairly south

32:30 dodging raiders and submarines and so forth, well down south and then up into Melbourne. And we got to Melbourne and of course the Sydney people got on the train and were sent off that night.

So you went off to Sydney that night?

Yeah. Yeah. To Garden Island. And got there in the afternoon and reported to the navy etc, with my calico

33:00 bag, kit bag, no hammock and a cap that didn't fit. I went home. I was to get back the next morning they said so away I went home to Watsons Bay. When I got home, mother was at church, it was a Sunday. I got in, I opened the front window and got in. Then my stepfather came home later and I had prised the window open.

He got the shock of

33:30 **his life?**

Yes he did.

And I mean what was your mum's response to seeing you?

Oh she got the shock of her life too. Cause she didn't know where I was at that stage. She knew I'd been in Palestine but apart from that she didn't know my movements from Palestine. But no idea.

Did they take you out to dinner or did you celebrate being home?

No they didn't.

34:00 Later on my stepfather won the second prize in the State Lottery and he took us all to the Wintergarden Theatre down here. Joan was, I was going out with Joan at the time, and my stepsister and the old boy at that stage, he was well over eighty. Gee, so am I! He went out at interval and bought a whole lot of ice creams.

34:30 We were sitting up the front row of the dress circle of the Wintergarden Theatre and he had them wrapped in a newspaper so when he came back to the theatre, as soon as the lights went on he launched the newspaper over and it fluttered down on the people down below. He said, "I've always wanted to do that and now I can afford to pay the fine." That was a great day of his life.

Was he fined?

35:00 No, no more was said about it cause nobody could work out who launched the newspaper.

So how much was second prize in the State Lottery?

Over a thousand pounds in those days, 1947 or thereabouts.

That would have been a lot of money?

Yes, oh it was a (UNCLEAR) amount of money.

Can you just explain the State Lottery to me, how it works, is it the same as Lotto today?

Well, more or less. It was,

35:30 the building for Lottery building was on the corner of York Street and Barrack Street, was it Barrack, the street that come up into York street was the Lotto office. And the lottery tickets were five shillings each and the first prize is five thousand pounds, the second was a thousand pounds and there were various smaller prizes. And when Jack Lang [Premier of New South Wales] started the lottery in the 1920, 30's there was a great outcry by the church

36:00 and so forth about gambling. However it became quite a habit to buy a lottery ticket. The price of tickets have gone up to more than five shillings now and so has the prize money. They were drawn about once a week.

And the results were broadcast?

Yes they were put in the paper. The day after the lottery was drawn the results would appear in the Sydney and daily papers generally,

36:30 the Sydney Morning Herald and Telegraph and so forth.

And to claim you monies you just took the ticket…?

Oh you took your ticket back in to the Lottery Office and they'd pay you a cheque.

So did your stepfather buy you something special with the money or the family?

Oh he put money into the improvements of the family kitchen and so forth.

37:00 That type of thing.

So how had Sydney changed when you returned from when you left?

Well, not a great deal. Well it had changed, they were building the dockyard at Garden Island. Captain Cook was being built when we came back. It took years to build it. And also at Garden Island the navy had what they call a shear legs

37:30 that's for lifting heavy weights out of ships, big shear legs. Now that had been right, half way on the western side of the island, been there since the First World War, but it was taken away on the Second. It wasn't there when we came back. When we went away it was. They also built a number of small ships like corvettes were being built in Australia; they built fifty-six altogether, quite a few in Sydney. They were now starting (UNCLEAR) on them.

38:00 **So construction was pretty big, what was happening around the harbour?**

Oh these ships were being built all over the place, Cockatoo Dock, Pearl and Steels at Balmain, Morts Dock were building these corvettes, other states were building them too. And destroyers were being built at Cockatoo Dock also. But

So where were you when the Japanese

38:30 **midget subs came into the harbour?**

Oh Watsons Bay. I was in the [HMAS] Kuttabul and we were paid so much a day to get our own, live at home more or less and come onboard every second day and do our work and it was my night ashore. And I heard the explosion and my mother said, "Oh it's just practice,"

39:00 I said "Oh that's not practice," I knew better than that. The next day of course I went to the island and the Kuttabul was sunk alongside, she was sitting on the bottom. Twenty-one men went with her. There was another torpedo went ashore on the island in the shallow water, gone off sort of sideways and that had to have the detonators taken out of it,

39:30 dismantled. Some of the navy blokes did that, that were skilled in these things. And they put a couple of guns on the island, anti-aircraft guns and the work on the dockyard was still going on for quite a while after that.

Tape 9

00:40 **Take us back a bit, how was your health when you arrived back in Sydney?**

Oh I was sent for a medical boarding and I had to go up and see the doctor at Sydney.

01:00 He made me Category B which meant service on big ships only and I got that changed later. I was a small ship man.

What was the problem, I mean what legacy of your accident did you still have?

That I still have?

What problems did you still have that made you Category B?

Oh, my back was giving me a lot of trouble. So I was eventually sent to the Australia,

01:30 it was the biggest ship in the navy at the time. Despite the fact that I got the Category B reorganised. And I was given a job as a loader in a 4 inch gun and I was picking up the shells and it was too much for me.

Can you tell us just before how you came to be on the Kuttabul?

Oh she was a depot ship. Accommodation ship basically and I was sent to Garden Island coming back from overseas and

02:00 she was the accommodation ship for people to sleep onboard. Later on the navy opened a place at Balmoral called HMAS Penguin and the Kuttabul was more or less moved to Penguin, the accommodation. In the meantime Kuttabul had been sunk.

What was, how big was the Kuttabul, I mean the Kuttabul's now quite famous in Australian history but can you tell us a bit about it?

Yes she was originally a North Sydney ferry, run from Milsons Point to Circular Quay.

02:30 She and her sister ship the Koompartoo were the biggest ferries in the harbour; they carried more passengers than the Manly boats did. Two thousand I think, was the capacity of them. They run backwards and forwards before the bridge was built. They came out, they were built about, I'm not sure of the date now, early 1920's they were built and built in Newcastle and they ran backwards and forwards until the bridge was built.

03:00 Then they were with the vehicular ferries, they were redundant. So they, the Kuttabul was taken up by the navy during the war which was a godsend for the ferry company. And the other ferries, some of them were made into showboats. One was the Koompartoo, was a showboat, Kalang was a showboat. Then the navy took them over and they were going to send the Koompartoo

03:30 as a boom-defence ship to the Persian Gulf but she never got there, they changed their mind. She was sent to Darwin as a boom-defence ship at Darwin. Kuttabul was the accommodation at Sydney.

What was the accommodation like on the Kuttabul?

Oh basic. Basic accommodation. Somewhere to sling your hammock, that was about it.

And how many nights did you spend onboard here?

Oh I don't remember now,

04:00 but every second night for a while. And the night that she was sunk I was, I was on the Kuttabul on the

Friday, the day before and a Japanese aircraft flew over the harbour, that wasn't generally known. This Japanese aircraft flew over the harbour and the air force and the army reckon it was an American. It was a Jap.

04:30 The Japs had four big submarines, one equipped with, there were two equipped with aircraft and one got sunk on the way here with aircraft and the others were equipped with midget submarines and they were, brought them down to well off Broken Bay out at sea there and the aircraft was launched, took pictures around the harbour and on the way back to the Japanese submarine it crashed, so they lost their aircraft. But they still launched

05:00 the submarines the next day. The (UNCLEAR)[Saturday?] it was.

What did you know of this aircraft; did you see this aircraft, what did you?

Well I was on duty at Garden Island and one of our ships was the (UNCLEAR)a defence ship and they must have seen the aircraft cause they flew the aircraft flag, very early in the morning.

05:30 But nothing happened about it, The aircraft got back to the, near the ship before she crashed.

When did that information about the Japanese reconnaissance plane come out?

Only recently. A Japanese pilot, he reckons he flew the aircraft, was interviewed by one of the newspapers, oh two or three years ago.

At the time you were told nothing about, there were no rumours that something was?

We didn't know, we were told it was one

06:00 of ours. But it was a float plane, a small aircraft. It fitted in a compartment on the submarine.

Where were you storing your gear at this time when you were accommodated on the Kuttabul every second night?

Some at home and some….mostly at home, mostly at home.

What did you have on the ship when she went down?

Not a great deal. No I didn't lose anything at all on the Kuttabul.

06:30 I had nothing on the ship at the time she went down. So I was lucky, there were twenty-one people killed in Kuttabul. The most amazing or the most unlucky bloke was a fellow who'd been in jail in The Corner. He'd done ninety days for one crime or another. And he was discharged from the jail and he was still under open arrest as it were and he was told

07:00 to put his gear on the Kuttabul and sleep on there that night and he did. And he didn't survive. She was sunk and he went with her.

Who did you know who was on the Kuttabul that night?

Nobody particularly. No I didn't know anybody special. I hadn't been back in Sydney very long; I was at Garden Island there for a while. No I had no mates on the Kuttabul.

What had happened to all your mates off the Kashmir,

07:30 **the Australians that were on the Kashmir?**

The Australians onboard. Well one chap Dusty Rhodes, having been decorated for shooting down aircraft went to HMS Sheffield and she was on ration convoys and then he went to the Shropshire later as an officer, lieutenant. Colin Downey went to a ship called the Emerald, a cruiser and then later on he went to, brought back to Australia and went to a tug called the

08:00 Spritely. It was navy owned, he was on the Spritely for a while and then on the Kanimbla. Washington came back to Australia and he went to a corvette called the Colac and he spent the rest of the war on the Colac. Geoffrey Dan got on the submarines; midget submarines and he took part in quite a few commando landings including D Day in Europe.

08:30 And they were coming out to Australia to put these submarines around Malaysia and these places and the war ended. So Geoffrey Dan didn't have to go on the submarines anymore. The other fellow, oh what was his name, oh I'll come back to him later. Bob Fenwick became an accountant later on. I don't know what he did in the navy at that stage.

Who were

09:00 **your friends that you wanted to catch up with then when you were in Sydney, when you came back after that time in England?**

Well in Sydney, I'd been to school in Sydney and I knew quite a few people here.

Were they in service during the war?

Oh most of them were, one service or another. My best friend was a chap called McFarlane, he was in the navy at that stage, he was on HMAS Napier and still on service.

Take us back to that night, you were staying with your

09:30 **mother in Watsons Bay, what happened in there, was there an alarm, did you hear the explosions from…?**

I heard the explosions.

Can you take us through that moment?

Yeah. And she said, "Oh they're only practising" and I said, "Oh I don't think so."

People in Sydney talk about that being the one time that the air raid sirens went off, what did you hear of that?

Oh of course

10:00 later they were chasing submarines all around the harbour. The one that did the damage disappeared. One was caught in the boom defence, which was being built at the time. This one got caught in the boom defence on the western side of the harbour. The other one got into the harbour and finished up being sunk in Taylor Bay and that's the bit they picked up the next morning. They picked up those two submarines and

10:30 made a submarine out of the two of them, the front part and one of the back, the stern part and that's down the War Memorial [Australian War Memorial, Canberra] now. The other submarine, that fired the torpedo that did the damage, went outside the harbour to join her mother ship and never got there. So we don't know, she disappeared anyway.

What was the moment when you found out something had happened then?

Oh when we got back to Garden Island the next morning and found the Kuttabul's

11:00 more or less sunk in the shallow water alongside. The Dutch submarine along beside her was damaged; the torpedo had been fished off the beach there. Of course all the people who got out of the Kuttabul, quite a few of them got out of course, were hanging about. And I remember one particular officer, a lieutenant commander, he wasn't very popular,

11:30 complained about these blokes. He went to see the master at arms, complained about that not being the regular day, they'd been in the water. So the master at arms had more sense. He told the fellows to disappear on the other side of the building and they got out of sight.

Was it a scene of confusion? I mean were people panicking a little bit in the navy?

Oh not panicking no, no panicking just that the people were

12:00 a bit amazed by it all. But the work had been going on in the dockyard under lights at night to get the work finished cause they put those out to the wrong, at the last minute however there were complaints about the lights being turned on etc. The actual ship that fired the torpedo aimed at an American cruiser called the Chicago and she was moored near Fort Denison

12:30 and she opened up with her guns and bounced a shell off Fort Denison. If you look at Fort Denison today, it's fifty years ago and look at it very closely you can see some of the stonework is new. Up towards the top.

What were your duties that day at Garden Island, what happened?

Oh anything I was told to do, I

13:00 sort of at the moment, had no special job there. I was mostly helping out in the Master at Arms Office. Cause they discovered that I could type with one finger, I did clerical work etc.

What happened as that day wore on with the capturing of the subs. Were there extra duties particularly in the wake of the attack?

Well it didn't affect me except they put some

13:30 anti-aircraft guns up on the hill at the island, at the hill at this end. Originally the island had two hills, one at each end but the southern one had been levelled years before, at the northern end it's still there. And they had an anti-aircraft gun there. I was put up there on one of the anti-aircraft guns at one stage, a point five inch machine gun. But we never had occasion to fire it.

14:00 **What did you see of the wrecks of the subs when they were pulled out of the water?**

Well they were taken out of the water. One was put on Shark Island and she was there for a while. The other was put on a display, where the Opera House is now and was put there for a while, on display, just for the general public to look at.

14:30 **How did that affect the general public and the atmosphere in Sydney?**

Oh it scared them. Oh they woke up to the fact that there was a war on. A lot of them had been pretty complacent people then but they realised then. Cause the next week a submarine fired a few shells over Bondi way and half a dozen, fortunately they were all duds

15:00 and left a few holes in buildings and the footpath and that sort of thing. But then all sorts of people who lived in the Eastern Suburbs decided they weren't too safe in the Eastern Suburbs and they moved out to other suburbs. Sold houses. Houses around Vaucluse were going very cheaply.

What about your mother in Watsons Bay?

She stayed there except that my sister was,

15:30 what was she, that's at about fourteen. My mother took her away from Kambala and sent her up to Springwood Ladies College up the mountains, thinking that would be safer.

How do you think she was affected by a submarine attack not far away from Watsons Bay?

Oh mother, she didn't say very much about it except she took Dulcie way up the mountains.

Where did you go to sleep that night,

16:00 **you were due to be back on the Kuttabul?**

Oh well I went back home. The Kuttabul was no longer available, so I went back home.

What happened after that as far as your accommodation arrangements went?

Oh I stayed home, I just went to the island every morning. Just like an ordinary job.

What other, you said that it brought home to people in Sydney that there

16:30 **was a war on, what other evidence was there in Sydney at the time there was a war on?**

Well there was a submarine had a go at Newcastle and the army at Newcastle, Fort Scratchley opened fire and that was about the first shot they'd fired. Then of course when the Japs were in the war they bombed Darwin, they bombed Broome and things

17:00 became hard to buy. Ration tickets were issued for all sorts of things. Petrol was rationed for example, clothing was rationed. And there was a semi-blackout imposed too. Especially the trams going down past Watsons Bay had their lights turned out and the Manly ferries

17:30 had their lights dim crossing the heads.

Would you go in by ferry or by tram? How did you get from Watsons Bay?

Oh tram, tram it was right outside our door where we lived.

What happened to you then after your stint at Garden Island, how did you get to….?

Oh I was at Garden Island for a while and I finished up being put there in charge of a baggage room

18:00 and at that stage my pay was well in arrears, I hadn't been paid properly for the best part of twelve months. So I went and saw, I kept a note of all the money I got mostly from charities like the Red Cross and the AIF and so forth. I kept a note of all that and what I should have got and I went and saw the paymaster at Garden Island and told him my sad story and he was astonished

18:30 and he gave me some cash straight away. The next day I got a crash draft to HMAS Australia, to get me out of the road. So I went away on the Australia and later on I got the rest of my pay.

You implied those two events were linked, do you think?

I think so. I think so. Two of us were at Garden Island and we were sent to Australia together. And this other chap Dolly Grey had a

19:00 bullet in his foot. He'd been hit by a Japanese spit bullet right in the middle of his foot and the doctors decided that rather than muck about and get this thing out, leave it there would do more use than pulling it out, this bit in his foot and he use to limp a bit. So we two, we were sent for to go on draft, we weren't told where we were going. And a doctor who was later on tossed out of the naval reserve examined us

19:30 and he said to Dolly Grey, "Well you're going to a ship so you'll be right." Any rate I said to the master at arms "What ship are we going to?" and he said to me "Oh, the Warramunga's commissioning." We didn't go to the Warramunga. We were put on a, a crowd of us were put on the back of a truck at Balmoral, taken down to Garden Island, alongside the Australia

20:00 and they said, "Righto men that's your ship." The Australia had a bad reputation. She had a few people didn't come back from leave. Classed as deserters. I went to the Aussie.

What was your reaction to that, you said you'd been classed to big ships only, did that, did that mean cruisers only or was a destroyer a big ship?

No it was just cruisers only.

So you weren't allowed to go

20:30 **to the Warramunga you had to go..? And what was your reaction at that?**

Well I had been in destroyers so I would have known my way around the Warramunga. I went to the Australia and I was given a job first of all as helmsman on the Aussie and we left the next day, went up north the next day at night. We went down the harbour and there was a submarine alert

21:00 so we anchored just inside the, where those white lights are at Watsons Bay, just inside there we were anchored for a while. And then we went to sea going north and there's a stinking southerly blowing, a very heavy sea and I was the helmsman and I had trouble steering the dash thing because she was getting her stern into the waves and going with them. So I had quite a battle and I was a bit worried about this. This will be, you know, won't be doing them much good.

21:30 So I said to the leading hand who was in charge of the wheelhouse, "How am I, what are we doing, how am I steering it?" and he said, "I don't know, I only joined the ship yesterday," he said, "I've never steered it." So here's the two of us, but I got through alright. But she was every which way.

That's a very important position, the helmsman?

Oh yes.

So how did you end up there?

Oh I was just there as able seaman so I could do the job.

22:00 The last bloke was banished. He went ashore and forgot to come back.

Can you describe a bit more about the Australia for us? I mean it was a much bigger ship than the destroyers you'd been on before?

Oh yes. Yes much bigger.

Can you describe it for us?

Yeah she was a, carried eight, eight inch guns, eight four inch anti-aircraft guns, two eight barrel pom-poms and numerous Oerlikon guns. She was

22:30 over six hundred feet long, a big flash deck ship and lots of windage so when she had a stern wind going at her at the harbour here she was, she use to go a bit of a sail in the breeze. She get a gust and away she'd go. We had the admiral onboard; Admiral Crutchley was the admiral in charge. He had the VC [Victoria Cross] from the battle of Zebrugge in the First World War.

23:00 Well the captain was H.B. Farncombe, known as 'Fearless Frank'. He was a bit unpopular. And

Why was he unpopular?

Oh he was a bit like Captain Bligh, you know.

For those in the future, what do you mean by that? What did he do to the crew?

Oh they had to do exactly what they were told and the crew was

23:30 about one thousand on the ship altogether. And she wasn't a very happy ship at that stage. However I was on the Aussie for some time and later on I was given the job as commander's seaman writer. The commander was a bloke called Harrington and it was my job to look after his office, make sure that he got his relayed orders out and so forth. It was a clerical job basically. And I liked it.

24:00 I worked like a demon. Instead of working four hours on, four hours off as a helmsman, I used to start at half past six in the morning and go til late in the afternoon. There were three writers who use to take it in turns at night to do the night duty but Harrington only knew one name and it was me. And I'd be sent for all sorts of things, he never slept. You'd be sent for at midnight, any time at all and he'd want something done.

24:30 So I had to sleep in the same spot on the ship and tell the half deck sentry where I was.

What did the writer's job involve? What were you meant to do?

Well the night orders are printed every late afternoon on a Gestetner, do you know what a Gestetner is?

No, not at all, can you describe it?

Well you print a little thing out on a special type of tissue paper and you put that in and then you

25:00 wound the handle and it came one at a time. And we had to print a whole few of those. They were sent

round various parts of the ship and other ships and company. Also keep a list of who was who and who was on leave and just general clerical work but I didn't mind, I did alright at it. He was a hard man too. I saw him

25:30 do some terrible things but he treated me all right.

Why would he call for you in the middle of the night? What sort of things would you have to do?

Oh he'd want something done, you know, "Where's Martin, go and get him". He'd come, he'd want some Admiralty Fleet order or some chart or something like that.

What was the Australia doing at this stage? Where ….?

She was the flag ship of the fleet. Canberra had just been sunk,

26:00 the Hobart was with us, the Adelaide was over in Western Australia, the Perth had been sunk, Sydney had been sunk and the Hobart was damaged later on by one of these famous Japanese torpedos off Guadalcanal. And we were doing a lot of patrol work up and down the Coral Sea and off New Guinea. We were back up for the New Guinea forces in case the Japanese came down and tried to

26:30 interfere with them.

How did this new theatre of war compare to the one you'd left in Europe and the Mediterranean?

Well it was much warmer.

Was it? Was much warmer?

And much less intensive. Not so many aircraft flying about, not so many. Submarines yes, but aircraft, not so many.

What were you on the lookout [for]? What were the biggest dangers or what

27:00 **were the things you had to patrol for in that region?**

Well mostly Japanese cruiser squadrons that might come down and they'd either land troops in the north of New Guinea or interfere with the army's operation there. The Japanese, as a matter of fact the Japanese Navy was very good at night. The Americans weren't so good at night. The Japs ran the show at night-time and the Americans in the daytime.

What

27:30 **advantages did the Japanese have over the Americans at night-time?**

At night-time? Well they reckon the Japanese had bad eyesight. That wasn't quite true, just because they had brown eyes. They could see at night. They had very good binoculars, the Japs, very good optical instruments, range finder and binoculars, very good indeed. And they were well organised to work together, their ships,

28:00 very well organised. And of course the Japanese are people who don't mind being killed. The Kamikaze aircraft later on proved that. Suicide bombers.

How did you find out about this new enemy? What were you told and how did you get this information?

Just by experience really,

28:30 generally speaking. We weren't told a great deal in fact. We were told some beaut fairy stories.

What experience then of enemy contact did you have onboard the Australia?

Very little. We just did patrol, generally three weeks at a time up around the islands and we never saw much of the Japanese, fortunately. Later on when General Macarthur started

29:00 advancing through the islands, the Australia was doing the bombardments for them. She was the leading ship for the bombardments but I'd left the ship by then.

What other problems were there? You mentioned the heat, how did that make things difficult in that region?

Oh it was warmer than being in the cold but heat was, one problem was

29:30 people got heat rash and that sort of thing, skin problems.

Any other problems personally, adjusting to life on a much bigger ship for you?

Oh no you battled on.

How hard was it to find your way around on the Australia?

Oh she was a big ship and you had to sort of learn your way around.

30:00 I was on an eight inch gun, two turret for action stations down on the shell handling ring, where the shells, eight inch shells they're that big. They weigh two and a half hundredweight. They use to come up and I'd bring them round and round with the turret and my job was to press the shells into the hoist up to the turret and that was beaut but unfortunately when the ships rolling you got two and a half hundred weight of shell. Make's it a bit difficult

30:30 at times. We had a problem one day, we had an ordinary seaman called Bernie. He came from Tasmania and he wasn't very bright. He come to the ship straight from new entry's college and they had to give this chap something to do so they gave him a job as port or starboard after bridge lookout. There are four corners and he was the starboard one on the aft side and there was an American destroyer

31:00 been there for, oh, some days. Now all of a sudden the bridge and various other people like the officer of the watch and the midshipman of the watch and the director layer, oh there must have been a dozen people on the bridge. So this bloke took over his duty, his lookout, to look over this section of the ship and his reliever, he came on at four o'clock and his reliever had spun the binoculars around

31:30 so he was looking through the wrong way. Any rate he suddenly gave an alarm, ship on the port, starboard beam, so nobody else could see it and the Yankee destroyer couldn't see it, the radar missed it, the director layer couldn't see it and the next thing we get, "All directors follow target". So all the directors guns followed

32:00 the directive so we loaded the blooming thing up with these eight inch shells ready to fire. The armour piercing shells, and oh he could see this ship, he could see it all right and they pressed the action stations, the admiral came up on the bridge. Nobody could see anything at all except this bloke and then somebody said, "You're looking through the glasses the wrong way." And he said, "Oh does it matter?" So all the panic subsided then, action stations

32:30 were called off.

What sort of repercussions were there for him from that event?

They could tell he was a nutter.

How big was the guns crew you worked in on the Australia. How many people were there?

In the guns crew, oh gee. In the turret, there was a turret and there was a shell room down below and there's a shell ring, a magazine, oh they'd be quite a few. I don't know how many there would be altogether.

33:00 But in the shell ring there was leading seaman and three of us on the shell ring.

Was this when you got issued with flash gear or…?

We had it issued but we didn't ever wear it, as we were told to.

What did you wear in it?

Oh just an ordinary boiler suit as a rule. But the flash gear was pretty hot.

How did your back fair under the

33:30 **pressure of that job?**

Oh alright. It had a few bad moments but generally speaking it wasn't too bad.

What were the hardest things for you to do physically?

Well actually, only pushing the shells in the shell ring was the hard bit, if the ship was rolling.

You imagine a big ship rolls less than a destroyer, is that true or false or…?

Oh it's true. It depends a bit on the design of the ship.

34:00 Basically speaking it's true that she rolls less. But the destroyers used to throw all over the place, they gave you a real rough ride. Cause the bigger ships aren't going quite so fast compared to their size as a destroyer and it depends on the state of the ocean too.

You mentioned a little while ago that when you joined her, the Australia wasn't a happy ship? What was it that

34:30 **detracted from it's happiness ?**

Well some people didn't like the captain, some didn't like the commander like I said already, some didn't like the officers. Yes it was just a bit unhappy, generally speaking. Some complained about the food, the food wasn't the best certainly. She wasn't really a well fed ship.

Was the food different

35:00 **to what you'd described to us before?**

Well basically it should have been the same but it wasn't the best. So we were always a bit hungry. For example in our mess I think there were twenty-two ratings. We got food, they only used to set for about twenty. So two would go and see the cook and say, "What about it?" We had a

35:30 chaplain there that they called Craven Sands who was a specially ordained Church of England minister, I think the Aussie was his first ship and he was all about this fellow and he was going to go around all the ships and see where everybody worked. So the first thing went, all the people off duty were summoned, some of us, to attend the chaplain's cabin

36:00 so we went down there and we were told about the terrible things like sex and sin, they were dreadful and drink, oh shocking. The boys noticed that he had in his cabin some communion wine. That disappeared and there was a fuss about that. The next thing the chaplain appeared up at the wheelhouse one day and I was steering the ship and he said, "So this is where the ship steers from?" and I said, "Yes". He looked around and he was amazed

36:30 by all the gadgets and he said, "I wonder if I could steer?" "Yes, Sir." So I put the ship right on, exactly on course and I said to him, "Now look, the wind's coming from over there and she'll gripe a little bit into the wind. And if I happen to give a little bit of wheel over that way, she'll go straight." Oh he thought that was pretty good. So he grabbed the wheel but the first thing that happens, if you give anybody a steering wheel, they'll turn it around,

37:00 so we're off like a… and then back. I said, "Get back the other way." and he was all over the place like a sea serpent. The officer of the watch was up the top. He couldn't see what was going on in the wheelhouse. So the chaplain said to him up the voice box "How am I doing?" and the officer of the watch told him in no uncertain terms how he was doing. He didn't know it was the chaplain. He thought it was me on the wheel.

37:30 So he said to me, "Would he speak to you like that?" I said, "Of course he would." So the chaplain went up on the bridge to tell the officer of watch not to speak to the ratings like that. It didn't get him anywhere.

How much did things improve during your time on the Australia as far as relations between people onboard?

Oh,

38:00 they weren't bad, a slightly improvement. We had, in our officers there was a bloke who went to another destroyer and he was most unpopular and his relief was an Englishman as a matter of fact, had been sent out from Britain to join a cruiser in Java and that part of the world. When he got out, Java had been taken over by the Japs. And this bloke was quite a gentleman,

38:30 a real English gentleman. He said 'please' and 'thank you' which nobody else ever did. So he was quite good. But the bloke who left the ship was quite rude.

How long did you spend in the Australia?

Oh about a year. And then I went to Officers' Training School. When my paper from the Kashmir had been lost I told them the story and I wasn't believed

39:00 half the time, reckon I was putting in a racket. However I eventually got there.

Apart from the stories you've already told us were there any other major events that happened during your time on the Australia that you can tell us about?

Oh not particularly. Oh yes, we had a supply ship called the Merca, German for Mercury. She had been a German ship and

39:30 she use to bring our supplies out to us and this particular day she brought a whole lot of stuff out to the ship including cartons of beer. We use to be able to buy beer if the supply ship was with us, for nine pence a bottle. And this beer was for the Officers' Mess that was coming in, on this particular occasion. And they had a working party on the ship taking all these supplies down to the storeroom, down the after part of the ship. And an Able Seaman Burns

40:00 was one of the working party. He'd been in the navy, oh quite a few years. He'd actually, he was a full time naval bloke and he was carrying in the cartons of beer down to the Officers' Store but on the way down he went into the shell room and put the beer there and went back. As soon as work finished he went down to the shell room and started to open a bottle of beer or two. More than two. And he was completely honkers bonkers

40:30 by the time the sunset came. And they use to send a leading seaman, every sundown he had to go round to all these magazines stores where the explosives were held and take the temperature and when he came here's Burns flat out on the floor, passed out. He had to report him of course. Burns got six weeks cells for that. He was put ashore in the next spot we were near, Townsville, and he got six weeks cells.

41:00 When he came back to the ship, he having done six weeks in an army gaol, probably better fed than we were on the Australia, he was certainly safer than we were on the Australia, he slept all night in, not four hours on and four hours off. He put in a request to see the admiral. So that was OK, he was allowed to see the admiral if he had a request and he told the admiral he wasn't properly, he shouldn't have been in jail, he wasn't properly

41:30 charged. It wasn't a proper offence and he was right too. They charged him wrongly or whatever so all his six weeks pay was sent to him and but after that he was a marked man. He had to watch the officers very carefully.

What became of him do you know?

Oh he was still on the Aussie when I left. He was still on the Australia,

42:00 I don't know what happened to him after that.

42:03 End of tape

Tape 10

00:48 **So Tom, what happened after you were on HMAS Australia, where did you go**

01:00 **to from there?**

Well I was, then they woke up to the fact that my story about the Officer Training School recommendation was correct. I was sent from the Aussie to Flinders Naval, Flinders College down in Melbourne, Flinders Naval Base is almost the same, Officers Training School down there. That would have been in late '43 and I did that course down there. That included some time on HMAS Bingarra.

01:30 She was a converted cargo ship which I reckon was wasted but however we were on the Bingarra. And

Why did you think it was wasted?

Well she should have been carrying cargo up and down the coast, I reckon. She was converted by the navy into an escort ship for convoys and then she was used as the officers training ship, we put a month on the Bingarra. But all the Bingarra's gear was all merchant service gear, it wasn't naval gear.

02:00 We had a four inch gun up on the fo'c'sle and we had an anti-aircraft gun down aft and we battled along there. I was put as an action leading seaman in charge of one of the watches on the Bingarra. But we went up and down the coast. We towed a Fairmile down to Melbourne at one stage. And anyway I had enough time on the

02:30 Bingarra any rate. I got by there. Actually I'd been in the navy about four years (UNCLEAR) shouldn't have nothing to worry about a ship.

So what were you trying, what were they trying to train you in respect to …?

Oh general (UNCLEAR). I was up on the bridge. I was put up on the bridge one day on the Bingarra and I was told to put her on, to alter course to a certain course and I did that and they said, "You've steered a ship before." and I said, "Yes, of

03:00 course I have." So that was the furtherest I got in steering the Bingarra. Once I got (UNCLEAR) everything was OK. But she was I reckon a waste of ship, but that's a politician's decision not mine.

So how long were you training at Flinders?

About three months and then the 1st of May, 1944 I got a commission as sub lieutenant

03:30 and I was told no more service at sea, I'd be put ashore. And I was put ashore in the navy force in the Plans Department.

So you were put ashore because of your commission or because of your health?

My health. And they told me seeing I'd been a naval seaman for years and they said, "Oh an officer's job is much harder." Any rate I was in the Navy Office Melbourne.

04:00 And one day in November 44, I collapsed in the street. I had a violent loss of blood, vomiting buckets of blood and I was picked up by a couple of people and an ambulance took me to hospital and I was given blood transfusions for some days. And no food except iceblocks, that's not very nourishing.

04:30 However I survived and I was in the hospital till after Christmas, until about February. Then my job at Plans Department was sort of not really available any more and I was sent to Sydney Naval Control Service, which is a service that organised convoys and merchant shipping work generally.

Just take a step back.

05:00 **You were violently ill and sick collapsing?**

Yeah.

What was that as a result of?

I don't know. I was in Melbourne, a Sunday afternoon. I was at that stage living in a place at Point Nepean Road at Elwood. We had to get our own accommodation there cause there wasn't any accommodation in the navy. But I was just coming home late in the afternoon

05:30 and I fell over in the street. And buckets of blood. I had a hematemesis, they call it. But they couldn't understand why or they didn't know but I had a quite deep ulcer and that was apparently been the cause of it. And I was in hospital until oh about February.

And they operated on the ulcer did they?

No.

06:00 Just gave me medication for it, medication.

My understanding of blood transfusions, they were pretty tricky back then and pretty dangerous as well? Was there any problems there?

No they gave me, except they dug a hole there and put a canula into the vein and when they took it all out

06:30 some time later, the young nurse had to stitch up the hole. And this girl stitched it up and I went like that and the stitch broke. "Oh," she said and she did it again. She said to me, "This is the first stitch I've put in," and I said, "Yes, I know." She'd stitched too close to the edge. (UNCLEAR)

07:00 stick the needle in further back "Oh." She got it right then. On her third attempt.

So in some senses it was good that you didn't go to sea?

Oh yes, I would never of, if I'd had the hematemesis on the ship I would have been finished. I reckon I'd have been finished, loss of blood. Because there's no ship, oh I don't know

07:30 any ships but the big ones that would be able to handle a case like that.

And once you got healthy the navy accepted you back?

Oh yes. I was sent to Sydney and then eventually to Newcastle. And Newcastle, I got there the week before the war ended and that's where I met Joan, in Newcastle. I was in the Naval Control Office up there. And I was demobilised in April

08:00 '46.

So there wasn't a point after you collapsed in the street where you thought, "Enough's enough, I'm not going back to the navy anymore"?

No. No actually I suppose had I done something about it I could have got out of the navy before then, when after the Kashmir was sunk maybe. But I was battling on.

So after you got your commission how did you feel not being on

08:30 **a boat at all?**

Oh a bit different. It was in some respects easier, in some respects in wasn't so good. After you join the navy to go on a ship, to go to ship. And I wasn't able to go to sea.

At this point sort of 1944, did you see the war coming

09:00 **to an end, both in Europe and in...?**

No well, when I was sent up to Sydney Naval Control Service, the war in Europe ended and later on of course the war against Japan ended when I was at Newcastle.

And what sort of things were you doing at Newcastle?

We looked after the merchant shipping.

09:30 The had run convoys from Newcastle and of course they were all finished. The ships were still equipped with convoy equipment, special signal books and so forth. We had to get all those back from the various ships as they came in. We had to get the guns off them and the paravanes off them and get them back into ordinary merchant service.

So the job was very much logistics, is that right?

Oh yes, yeah.

10:00 I was living in a boarding house in Church Street, Newcastle near the cathedral. And that's where I met Joan. She was living in the boarding house too. So I looked after us alright.

So did you see yourself having a future in the navy before the war had finished?

Well yes and no. I had no chance of getting back in the

10:30 navy with my health. I couldn't even pick up to get in the naval reserve after that because I couldn't pass the doctor. But the navy were about to form the Fleet Air Arm and they were offering commissions to air force blokes to change over to the navy to fly off the aircraft carriers and maintain their seniority. Well the great thing with the navy is seniority, what date you became a particular officer.

11:00 And they offered other people in the navy, they wanted a certain number to go in but their seniority was the date when they joined up again. Now, in my case that would have been two years or so later. Instead of being '44, it would have been 46. And that didn't make me happy at all. Actually I couldn't have passed the doctor so it didn't matter.

So are you expressing that you did want to join the Fleet Air Arm?

Oh no,

11:30 I thought they'd done the wrong thing, the way they organised it. Oh no I wanted out at that stage, I wanted out. I'd just done six years in, that was enough.

So just share with me then the story, when did you hear about the end of the war with Japan in the Pacific? Where were you?

At Newcastle. I'd got to Newcastle in August

12:00 and the Japanese war ended about a week later. But

Is that when you heard about the atomic bombs?

Oh yes, we knew about them. They'd been dropped because they more or less finished the war for Japan. As a matter of fact I've been to Japan a few years ago and the best city in Japan is Hiroshima, which was where the atom bomb was dropped. Cause it's been completely rebuilt, completely rebuilt. So it's brand new,

12:30 more or less, it was new fifty years ago. Except they've kept one or two buildings which were damaged by the atom bomb. They're there still in their damaged state.

So just share with me the story of how you left the navy and went back, what were the events that led you back to the pharmacy?

Oh, I had a job there, I knew I'd get a job there. I went back there and

13:00 applied for my job back, which I knew I'd get. And I was sent to Bondi Junction branch. Now I'd been an apprentice at Bondi Junction years before and did my apprenticeship. I knew the manager there. I was quite friendly with him and the bloke who was there had been sent there as, he was a bit of a no hoper, bit of a 'I am' man,

13:30 as the assistant. And he wanted out and he wanted something better. He wanted to run the whole show from up top. Any rate he was told that he'd be better off selling vegetables and he decided to go and sell vegetables or something. And I went to Bondi Junction. I was there for a couple of years as an assistant. Then I went as a manager down to William Street Branch. We had a shop on the corner

14:00 of Bourke and William Streets in those days. And from there up to Kings Cross. I was up there for eleven years at The Cross and then back to Bondi Junction as manager for some years. And then into town, Assistant Manager at Pitt Street.

So how did you cope with your health problems, first your back and then secondly obviously this collapse that you had? Did you have repercussions from that?

Well I should have had a sit down job,

14:30 I think. I was on my feet all day long. And people were surprised that I didn't have a sit down job. But

A sit down job for your back is that…?

Yes. Yeah. It gave me a lot of trouble and a lot of discomfort. I couldn't do much about it.

So the war's ended and Anzac Day

15:00 **starts up again but World War II, well Anzac Day continues with World War II fellows in it. How important is Anzac Day for you?**

For me, oh it's important. I use to march with a naval group but I haven't been able to march for the last

few years. The naval group which saw half a dozen chaps I joined up with RAN. But unfortunately three of them are deceased since then, so,

15:30 and I can't march anymore.

Though it's been an important part of your life?

Yes, yeah.

Some times in this job we hear some pretty tall tales from Anzacs about their war service. When you go up, over the years when you've gone to the pub and listened to fellows talk, have you heard some tall tales

16:00 **told to you?**

I saw one printed in a newspaper that was sent down from my daughter's mother-in-law at the time, she's now deceased. (UNCLEAR) About the Canberra being sunk. The Canberra was sunk at Guadalcanal in 1942. The crew were rescued, some of them never even got their feet wet. She was in a bad way but destroyers came alongside and took

16:30 the crew off. There were quite a few of them wounded by Japanese shell fire. But this bloke had been a newspaper reporter and told he served on the Canberra. And how they were, the ship sank and he spent eight hours in the water fighting off sharks. Oh that was a good story. That was a beauty. And he survived the sharks and all. I don't know what ship he was on, but he thinks he was on the Canberra.

17:00 **So occasionally you hear stories like that…?**

Oh yes you hear some good ones every now and again, some good ones, Michael.

Any other ones like that?

Not that I can think offhand, no. Another friend of mine was a chap called, he was an able seaman, a petty officer really. He came back from the Middle East with us. He'd been on a ship called the Moresby, now the Moresby she was a

17:30 permanent navy boat. In the 1930's was a survey ship, so this bloke was also a diver, he was a qualified diver. He used to wear his diver's badge just there on the arm. And he met a bloke in the pub and he was having a drink and this chap says, "What's that badge you've got?" Oh he said, " It's a beehive." "What ?" "Yes," he said, "We're keeping bees on the Moresby because we reckon honey is a very good thing for sailors."

18:00 He told this bloke a great tale about bees on the ship and this chap said, "I'm a beekeeper. I might send a jar of my honey to you and you send me some of yours and we'll compare them." Any rate he sent one to my mate, Snowy Finamore [?], a jar of honey and Snowy just sunk the label off and sent it back to him saying it was the honey off the Moresby.

18:30 And a letter came back saying it was very good honey but he still thought his was the best honey. Made up around the North Shore line somewhere.

Just a final few questions to sum up your war experience?

Yeah

You've obviously lived with injuries since the war and tried to cope. Are there any regrets you have of joining the navy and

19:00 **joining the war?**

No. No. It was the thing to do at the time and I did it. I could have got out during half way through but I decided I wouldn't, I'd battle on.

And I take it you could have got out after your collapse?

Oh yes, yes, and even before then after the Kashmir went, I could have got out.

But you wanted to

19:30 **see it through?**

Oh yes, I wanted to see it through after all that's what you join the navy for.

What was, in your service, what was the bravest thing you ever saw?

Gee I don't know Michael, I don't know. No I couldn't tell you, couldn't tell you.

What about the reverse, the most cowardly

20:00 **thing?**

It's a bit hard to say, except you know blokes who deserted their ship. There weren't many of them

fortunately, that was cowardly in many cases. They deserted their ships for a couple of reasons, one was because they were frightened, that was understandable and the other one was because they'd been mucked about for some reason or another

20:30 and they got out of the service. They were just disgusted. But that's about all I can tell you.

Given that future generations in fifty, a hundred years time will watch this interview, what would you like to say to them about the subject of war?

Oh don't be in it. I reckon we shouldn't be in this war in Iraq to start off with.

21:00 I think they can do things much better than going to war. The trouble in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine well that's just about incurable and also the trouble in Yugoslavia a couple of years ago, that goes back for hundreds of years, with the monomanias. There were anti-Christians and the Christians and they got stuck into one another and they still

21:30 are. Well that was the Greeks and the Turks. That's incurable too.

Given that you don't think, you know, that some of these wars are incurable was it worth Australia being involved in World War II?

Yes. It was. I think so. I think it an ethical point of view but I don't think, I don't think we should be in, or in Vietnam, I didn't agree with that

22:00 at all. And in Iraq right now, I reckon they're making a mistake there.

And why was World War II, do you think it was ethically right?

Oh yes well Hitler was taking over countries and so forth and he was anti-Jewish, he did some terrible things to the Jewish population of Germany. And later on his submarines

22:30 did some terrible things too, to seamen at sea.

Are there any last comments that you'd like to add to your interview today?

Not particularly, I hope it's been useful for you though I've seem to have prattled on a lot, got sidetracked but however if it's been useful, well it's OK.

23:00 **Well Chris and I would like to say thanks so much for your time. We appreciate it Tom.**

Thank you Michael, it's been a pleasure to work with you two boys.

Oh good, thanks Tom

23:14 **INTERVIEW ENDS**